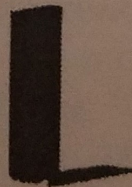


A Field Guide to Otherkin

By Lupa



Megalithica books



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Field Guide to Otherkin

By Lupa

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Praise For Lupa's *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone:*
A Primal Guide to Animal Magic

An extremely well put-together manual of animal magic. Most books on the subject are encyclopedic descriptions of animals, and their "traditional" symbolism and power. While some of those books are interesting, Lupa's *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone* makes them useful. The best part is that the book is written from hard-won experience in the field; I can personally vouch for that.

--Nicholas Graham, author of *The Four Powers*

Unlike pretty much everything else out there on animals and magic today, it's not a "totem dictionary" in any sense of the word. Instead, Lupa presents a variety of approaches and techniques ranging from a guided meditation suggested for finding a totem to a chapter on the legalities and practices of animal sacrifice...Lupa tackles things from a very practical and experiential point of view, and talks about her own practices and experiences, giving a strong grounding to what could have otherwise been a book largely on theory...Well worth the money spent. Good job, Lupa!

--Erynn Rowan Laurie, author of *Path of Fire: A Celtic Reconstructionist Guide to Ogam*

When Lupa asked me to do this review, I was of two minds. I thought "well a GOOD book on animal magick would be a wonderful thing for the community." The other part of me thought "I doubt this is going to be that book." I LOVE it when I'm wrong.

This is not a book that is an encyclopedia about the Spirit Animals or what they do or don't do. There are tons of other resources for that... This book gives you practical information on working with not only the Spirit Animals, but also with familiars and those who see themselves as being animals in some regard...I am very glad I have a copy of this book and it will be one book I am sure to reference many times in my own works with my cats and with my Spirit Animals in the future.

--Daven of <http://www.davensjournal.com>, The Wiccan/Pagan Times (<http://twpt.com>)

Other Books by Lupa from Immanion Press/Megalithica Books

Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone: A Primal Guide to Animal Magic (2006)

Magick on the Edge: An Anthology of Experimental Occultism (contributor of
"Totemism and Transformation" essay, co-contributor with Taylor
Ellwood of "Evoking Lupa" essay, 2007)

Kink Magic: Sex Magic Beyond Vanilla (cowritten with Taylor Ellwood,
November 2007)

For more information please visit <http://www.immanion-press.com> or
<http://www.thegreenwolf.com/books.html>

To my husband, editor, and fellow author, Taylor, without whom my writing would be a lot less thorough and my life would be much lonelier. Thank you for being my mate—I couldn't do it without you.

To Storm Constantine and all the other great folk at Immanion Press/Megalithica Books, thanks for taking a chance on an unknown author and publishing *Fang and Fur*, and then having enough faith to contract this one as well. It is an honor and a joy to write for you and to offer my support where I can. Thank you for everything you do!

And to Otherkin, whether you consider yourself a part of the community or not, whether you use the term or something entirely different, whether you're just starting on your journey of self-discovery and development, or have been doing this for years, whether I've met you in person, online, or not at all—thank you for being you. It's helped me many times knowing I'm not the only one, and for knowing that there are some really fascinating people out there amongst us.

Acknowledgements

First, I'd like to recognize everyone who took the time to fill out one of the ubiquitous surveys for this project. Your answers, almost universally, were well-thought-out and thorough, and really helped me to make this a much better book. I hope you like the result, something that every one of you contributed to.

I'd also like to recognize those who helped out with information and random bits of help, as well as support: Rialian (foreword, march!), Chris Carter (yay, essay!), Storm for the excellent copy edit, Storm and Jo for the layout help, Taylor for patiently editing and reediting, Jim for the cover and and for adding your contributions to those of Naryu, sade, Colleen and Holly for the interior illustrations, Solo and Duo, Lyssa, Orion Sandstorm (that booklist is a true gem!), Malcolm and all the other folks involved in Otherkin.net in various fashions, Nicholas Graham, a whole bunch of folks on my Livejournal friends list who helped with questions and reviewing ideas, and everyone who acted as moral support, especially when I hit rough spots. I know there are others, those who asked tough questions and who cheered at the victories, who I'm forgetting, and I apologize if I've omitted you; 'twas nothing personal, just a lack of room (or memory!)

Finally, I do want to thank author Patrick Harpur. I am horrible about coming up with titles for things I've written, and when I was trying to find a good title for this book, I allowed my mind to simply let words and phrases float up at random. It wasn't until I'd fallen in love with *A Field Guide to Otherkin* that I realized that it was most likely unconsciously influenced by Harpur's *Daimonic Reality: A Field Guide to the Otherworld*. So, Mr. Harpur, if you happen to read this, I just want to thank you for the inspiration. (And to all my readers, I would highly recommend his works for anyone with any interest in the Otherworld whatsoever!)

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Foreword

Why Otherkin?

Perhaps because it is not worth the energy to argue against it?

This is pretty much how I started working with this concept. I consider myself on an elven path, not because of way too much Tolkien (although my parents are very deep fans of Tolkien and Lovecraft, which apparently is explanation enough for me to some), but because it felt like the right path to work with. Was it worth the effort and time to deny that odd feeling of identity, when I could be exploring and working with it to get to someplace interesting?

Well, you can likely guess my answer to that question.

I decided a long time ago that that I would be guided by that inner pull, that feeling of rightness, balanced with an equally strong sense of reason. Too often, folks take a path and accept all the rules that they imagine that should be there, and those "rules" and perceptions are all too often servants of personal issues that have not been dealt with in an aware way. This is true whether you are someone that thinks they are an elf, or if you are someone that mocks anyone not like you.

Otherkin is a concept that is very individualistic...and I think that Lupa has approached her topic the right way, and with the proper attitude. Over the years, there has been many an attempt to delineate, codify, or otherwise organize folks that might consider themselves "otherkin", some of which have been (or continue to be) what I would consider insane. Thankfully, Lupa is more into reporting the data, and presenting ideas...and not into the ideology that something has to be explained and packaged. It is not a movement so much as a culture of concepts that have an interesting ecology. A field guide is perhaps the only real way to go in this case, as anything else misses the point.

There is no one accepted definition of what it is to be otherkin. I personally tend to use it as a descriptor of a bunch of folks that have a bit of that mythic feel. It fits (for me) a sub-set of what others use the term for. Ask someone else, and it will involve reincarnation, dragons, perhaps other worlds and dimensions. A third might be into the building of a spiritual movement, and think it is all about ascension (whatever that actually means...) I happen to think that the definitions are interesting, but they read as shopping lists....and my life really is not a shopping list, or a contest to see who has the most "traits". What does the person FEEL like? How do they express that essence in the world?

I call myself elven because it feels right. I did not go looking for it. This overall path is not about how many identities you can put on. It is not about making yourself important. Most of the folks I respect are rather similar in this regard. We did not go decide one day that being this way would be nifty. We do not bother arguing with those that say we are insane. There really is no point to do so. We accepted when we decided that it was not worth the waste in time, energy, and life worth living to argue with this understanding that others put a lot of effort into mocking others. We would rather put that energy into living our lives, and connecting to others that might have something to add that will enrich. If we needed validation, we would have likely chosen a bit more conventionally...most of us are not all that unintelligent, if our chosen occupations are any indicator of competence. (soft chuckle)

Do I agree with everything in this book? Most assuredly not. Neither should you. I can attest that Lupa has done a rather good job being objective in her research and presentation, and that already places her well ahead of most folks that I think would be writing on this subject. Someone had to write it...I am glad that it was someone that is not out to organize the folk that she is writing on, nor was it someone that did not actually understand what they were trying to write about.

Rialian Ashtae

Rockville, Maryland

January 1, 2007

Rialian started his foreword with the question, "Why Otherkin?"

This is a question with several answers. The first answer I have is in regards to why, specifically, I wrote this book. It's my second published book, my first being *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone: A Primal Guide to Animal Magic*. Getting the first one published left me on a creative high, and I wanted to put that momentum to good use.

I can't remember just how many times I've seen posts on the Internet about "Hey, I'm writing a book about Otherkin! Wanna fill out my survey?" Admittedly, I didn't come up with anything different—I used the survey format as well. And I quickly found out just how valuable that primary source of information is! There's not much in the way of printed resources on Otherkin, and what is out there, in my opinion, ranges from good to bad to downright scary. Fortunately I got a lot of really good survey responses as well as plenty of great suggested support material. The bibliography is pretty heavy on internet source material, but that's out of sheer necessity. The Otherkin subculture has blossomed primarily because of the internet. The vast amount of information that is freely available, as well as the opportunity to disseminate personal experiences and discuss it all over virtual coffee, has helped 'kin make connections and further our journeys to a great degree. But as with anything on the internet, the information can be spotty as it's pretty much unedited, so I had to be selective about what online resources I used.

As for books, Otherkin are mentioned in a few odd places. Christine Wicker's *Not in Kansas Anymore* and *The Veil's Edge* by Willow Polson both mention Otherkin, though from a non-'kin viewpoint, and as parts of books that deal primarily with other topics. While Doreen Virtue never uses the word "Otherkin" in her book *Earth Angels*, the concepts she describes will be very familiar to most 'kin (albeit heavily influenced by the New Age). And there are several books about specific types of Otherkin written by 'kin themselves; you'll find a number of them referenced throughout this text as well as in the annotated bibliography.

I do want to take a few sentences to mention something about my approach to therianthropy in *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone*. My primary intended audience for the entire book, that chapter included, is people who work magic, particularly those who are willing to push the boundaries of magical practice. Therefore some of the material on

therianthropy is admittedly rather unorthodox, especially when I start talking about experimenting with personality aspecting. However, my audience here is different; whereas for the last book I was writing as a magician who just happens to be a therianthrope, here I'm writing as a therianthrope who just happens to be a magician. The therianthropy chapter here is a lot more straightforward and less ensconced in experimental magical techniques.

That and a few more entries in the bibliography pretty much sum up the books that exist on the subject at the time of this writing, at least to my knowledge (not including books on folklore, mythology, and related areas of study).¹ I do know of a couple of other people working on books on Otherkin as of this writing; I see this as a good thing. After all, the more material we have to work with, the better, as far as I'm concerned. Even if not all people agree with everything that's said, it still sparks conversation and thought. And for all those hopeful authors who just never quite got around to it—I hope my success will inspire you to add to the bookshelves!

That's one answer. Another is that I myself identify as Otherkin—a wolf therianthrope, to be exact—and I find this particular subculture to be absolutely fascinating. I wanted to use this project as a learning experience, because while I had a pretty decent handle on the concept of Otherkin at the start I still had a lot of blanks to fill in just in my personal knowledge. In my opinion, if the author doesn't learn anything from writing a book, s/he's not trying hard enough! I do have to say that this was an enjoyable learning experience, and I hope my research is beneficial to others.

And finally, the third answer is that I believe there needs to be more information about Otherkin available to those exploring the subject. For many of us, Otherkin is an identity that answers a number of questions we have about ourselves. In my experience, as an example, I have always resonated strongly with wolves. Even as a young child I identified as a wolf—though I knew I didn't have fur and walked on two legs instead of four, I still thought of myself as a wolf. When I discovered the concept of therianthropy it was like I'd finally found my home. Everything clicked into place: “Aha, so *this* is why I am the way I am!”

I do understand that there will be people who look upon this project with some trepidation. One concern I've seen floating around is whether or not the publication of a book will suddenly thrust the

¹ I do highly recommend that you check out the Otherkin and Therianthrope Book List maintained by Orion Sandstorm, which was a huge help to me in finding good books to use as source material. At the time of this writing the URL for it is <http://therithere.com/otherkin/>

Otherkin community into the media spotlight. From my own perspective, we're already getting more exposure to the mainstream, thanks to the internet, where anyone can plug anything into any search engine and find information. While I'm sure some people would be quite happy to stay closeted, for better or for worse we're slowly getting brought out into the light as it were. I detail some of the recent (relative to this writing) appearances we've made in the media in the first chapter. I figured that since people are going to find out about us eventually, we may as well let them be informed by us, rather than by third parties who may not always understand us. This is another reason why I encourage other people with manuscripts in the works to go ahead and get published—one book is not sufficient to explain an entire subculture.

I want to make a couple of comments on the composition of my primary source material. I relied heavily on the responses I received from the survey. I figured that the best way to research a topic on which there's very little published information would be to go to Otherkin themselves. This means, however, my results were dependent on the responses I got. Since I couldn't just force every single Otherkin-identified person in the world to fill out my survey (and I surely wouldn't want to try!) my results probably vary to some extent or another from the community as a whole. Some chapters are more quote-heavy than others. Since they are the closest I get to actually defining different types of Otherkin, I figured I'd let the Otherkin speak for themselves. Again, I want to present a spectrum of examples, rather than hard and fast rules of what each type of Otherkin is or isn't.

The amount of information varies on each type of 'kin. This roughly mirrors the number of respondents of each type I got for my survey, as well as the amount of available information to be found otherwise. It's not that therianthropes are any more interesting than gryphons, but simply that I had access to a lot more information on therianthropes than gryphonkin for this book. If you feel underrepresented, please feel free to answer the survey which is in Appendix C, as I intend to add information to subsequent editions of this book. Also, if you filled out a survey and I didn't quote you, it's simply because I got a LOT of good responses—there were 130 survey replies, and the vast majority of them were very detailed. This is particularly true for larger groups, such as therianthropes—I simply couldn't find room to quote everyone! But, regardless, I do want to thank everyone who sent in answers, and you can check out the raw data in Appendix D.

You'll notice that I'm fond of citations in the form of footnotes. There are over 300 of them, in fact. The only source material I have not used citations for are surveys, and that's simply because were I to create a footnote for every single piece of information I got from a survey, the

number of footnotes would more than double. Suffice it to say, if someone says something, and there's no footnote, it came from a survey. I have used, for the most part, APA style citations, and modified the citations to footnotes, simply because 300+ in-text citations would break up the text too much. Additionally, I have cited any quoted or paraphrased material from books and from websites. Internet-published material, even if it has never seen print, is still owned by someone, and is subject to the Fair Use Provisions of the U.S. Copyright Act. Therefore, I treat it the same way as I treat book-sourced material.²

Also, you'll note my use of the gender-neutral pronouns "hir" and "s/he". It's easier for me to use them than to try to decide "Hmm...he or she? His or hers?" Feel free to make use of them—they're not my creation by far, but they are very useful in a day and age where the ideas of sex and gender are becoming less like a dichotomy and more like a continuum. And while we're on the topic of words, I use 'kin as an abbreviation of Otherkin (as you've probably already noticed). I use it as an adjective ("the Otherkin community" or s/he is Otherkin"). However, I personally only use it as a plural noun ("they are Otherkin" as opposed to "he is an Otherkin"). I have seen some people use it as a singular noun; I personally choose not to, but I am not any final authority on what part of speech the word "Otherkin" is. I do, however, always capitalize it, another personal preference; Rialian's preface, for example, uses "otherkin". Additionally, sometimes I write "Otherkin" and sometimes I write "other 'kin". These are not interchangeable. The former is a proper noun; the latter is a shorter way of saying "other Otherkin". And if I refer simply to someone being Other, I'm emphasizing that which is not human in that person.

Finally, I've occasionally had people ask about my inclusion of guest essays in my books. I like getting people addicted to their creativity. Nicholas Graham, for instance, who wrote a guest essay for *Fang and Fur*, went on to finish the manuscript for his own excellent work, *The Four Powers*, and it was published by Immanion Press/Megalithica Books in 2007. I like showcasing some good thoughts that aren't my own. It's the same reason I like giving new artists a shot with my books when I can—it gets some variety in there, and it also gives someone else a new piece or two for their portfolio. So if you like

² There's a ton of information available about copyrights and Fair Use; including online. I've found that <http://www.templetons.com/brad/copyright.html> is a good place to start, with links to further exploration. I also remind people that any publicly available information, including that on websites that anyone may access, is fair game as source material—in short, if you don't want someone talking about what you wrote, don't make it available. I've chosen to avoid message boards, forums and other forms of idle communication as source material, but essays and other sites meant to inform readers are in the same category as books for all practical purposes.

the guest writings and artwork, feel free to contact their respective creators whose information may be found on the back side of the title page.

I certainly can't define Otherkin for everyone, but I do hope this book helps you with your own study, whether you're 'kin yourself, or just curious. Feel free to shoot me an email at chaohippie@excite.com or friend me on Livejournal (my username is lupabitch), and, if you like, take a peek at the website I maintain with my mate, Taylor Ellwood, at <http://www.thegreenwolf.com>.

Welcome to *A Field Guide to Otherkin*. This isn't a traditional field guide, with tons of statistics and taxonomy and full color pictures of assorted species. It is, however, a practical guide to the Otherkin subculture, designed for use by both 'kin and non-'kin alike. In the following pages you'll read about who and what Otherkin are, who or what we identify with, what brings us to our conclusions about ourselves, and what we can do with that identity.

However, like a traditional field guide this book is presented as information gained from experience in the field itself. I've been exploring my wolf side for over a decade, and have interacted with numerous other 'kin both in person and online. In addition, I'm presenting the information as an invitation for others to explore, whether 'kin or not.

If you identify as Otherkin (or at least suspect that you may be) then some of this book may seem quite familiar to you. You may have read something on the internet, or happened across an article or book that mentions us. Or you may simply suspect that there's something not quite human about you, and are curious to see if others' experiences match your own. On the other hand, you may even already be immersed in the Otherkin community—or someone who decided to drop out for whatever reason.

If you're not Otherkin, chances are good that you may look askance at whoever introduced you to the idea of Otherkin (even if it's your dear author, and you just happened to see this book on a shelf). Don't feel bad. A lot of us question the concept heavily when we first encounter it, too, even if we like the idea of it. In fact, some of the Otherkin reading this may be wondering if this isn't all just in our heads. Being nonhuman in a human society is a concept that can be a little tough to wrap your mind around if you're new to it. That sort of thinking tends to get relegated to ancient mythology or mental insanity—either way, it involves detachment from the common perception of reality. The key to understanding, however, lies in the open mind.

When studying any subculture it's important to approach it with cultural objectivity—judging the people by their own standards instead of yours. It's especially important in light of the fact that the very basis of Otherkin—the belief that a person can be something other than human—is easily labeled as delusional. Looking at the belief objectively,

however, how is believing that you were an elf in a past life any stranger than believing that a deity manifested on Earth in human form, or that certain humans chosen by the Divine were taken to the Afterlife corporeally, or that ordinary bread and wine can be transmuted into literal flesh and blood? Or, for that matter, if you're a neopagan who believes in faeries and dragons and animal spirits, is it that much more difficult to believe that such beings can manifest into human bodies, particularly if you believe that it's not just humans that reincarnate?

Still, people have a tendency to judge by their own standards. It's imperative that in order understand Otherkin in a relatively objective manner that this tendency should be set aside for the time being. This doesn't mean that you have to automatically believe everything that's said—or even any of it. But true skepticism (not debunking, with which “skepticism” has been mistakenly interchanged) demands entering into a discussion with as little bias as possible so that all arguments may be accepted and weighed equally (This applies to Otherkin as well as non-kin, by the way.).

I will admit my own bias. I am writing this as someone within the Otherkin subculture. In fact, as balanced as I've tried to be as an author, it's pretty well impossible for me to completely eliminate my voice from the work. In addition, my tendency to avoid dogma has led me to present a wide variety of viewpoints rather than stating what Otherkin absolutely are or are not. I can't write a book that will please everyone, so, as with anything, I urge you to grab your shaker of salt and your Occam's Razor³ and apply where you see fit. *This is only one viewpoint on the Otherkin subculture*, not the One True Way of Otherkin.

A Few Terms

Amid the wide spectrum of kin, there are some general categories into which people can be divided. I'm dedicating more space to these later on but I wanted to summarize them briefly here to allow for better understanding of subsequent material.

Elves and fey: While some elves tend to see themselves as a separate group from faerie beings, others include themselves under that heading. Some elves have recreated a number of possible historical details from past life memories involving their cultures and worldviews. Fey can refer to everything from pixies to trolls to phoukas. Many resemble Euro-centric mythos, particularly Celtic, Norse, or Germanic folklore, or modern derivatives such as Tolkien.

³ Sir William of Ockham was a 14th century scholar; Occam's Razor basically states that the simplest answer is the most likely.

Therianthropes: These are people who identify as Earth-based animals in some respect. The species represented tend to be wolves, big cats and other more impressive animals but I've seen horse, rabbit, deer and even dinosaur, earwig and kiwi therians, either in person or online. Some therianthropes distance themselves from the Otherkin heading, finding it to be too fantastic to be believed or just considering everyone else to be a little too flaky since they identify with "make-believe" beings, though others are content to be included in that group. In addition, some sectors of the therian community tend to be very stringent in questioning themselves and others as to what exactly defines therianthropy.

Mythological animals: Less common but still a sizable group, these are 'kin who resonate with animals not native to Earth. Dragons are most common, but gryphons, unicorns and others pop up on occasion. Also included are variations on mundane animals, such as faerie hounds.

Vampires: Vampires tend to be categorized into two groups, psychic and sanguine. The former feeds primarily on pure energy while the latter must take energy via blood to be healthy. While there may appear to be some amount of organization and division among the vampire community, there are numerous vampires of both types who make no allegiance to any house or other formality. Some prefer to distance themselves from vampire "lifestylers", a subsection of the Goth subculture who adopt dress and mannerisms that are associated with popular depictions of vampires, but who do not share the need to feed to remain healthy.

Angelkin and Demonkin: Not always as dualistically defined as the traditional Judeo-Christian ideas of angels and demons, these 'kin may resemble a variety of cultural definitions of similar beings. Angels may also refer to themselves as avatars or celestials, though the latter may be considered by some to be a separate group.

Kitsune: Not precisely fox therianthropes and not quite purely mythological animals, kitsune are a unique group of fox spirits with a rich mythos of magic and cultural lore from China and Japan. Included in the chapter on miscellaneous types of 'kin.

Multiples and Walk-ins: I've included these two groups in the origin theories chapter rather than categorizing them as a type. They're not necessarily always Otherkin, as both groups have folks who are entirely

human. There is a sizable portion of the 'kin community, though, who attributes their being Other to being walk-ins and/or multiples.

Otakukin/Mediakin: A highly controversial group, opinions vary as to whether or not they're Otherkin or a separate phenomenon. These are people who identify with characters or species from various media, such as anime/manga, fantasy books and movies, and video games. Many maintain that these media are just modern mythology, and that traditional mythology was just our ancestors' version of pop culture.

Definition, Identity, and Belief

I've already answered "Why Otherkin". But that still leaves another query: What are Otherkin?

I'll be honest: it took me quite some time to formulate a decent answer to this seemingly basic question. The problem is in defining a respectively small minority of people who manage to represent a broad spectrum of backgrounds and viewpoints. I wanted to create a definition that would express the idea behind being Otherkin without excluding key subgroups while acknowledging a working boundary of the term. At the same time I also wanted to be sensitive to the fact that some members of some groups—certain therianthropes and vampires, for example—don't consider themselves to be under the Otherkin umbrella. Add in that just about every person who's ever thought about the concept of defining Otherkin usually comes up with more than one theory as to what Otherkin are, and I found myself with quite a task.

In addition, to be a bit cruel, but up-front—it's tough to write this without it sounding like a manual for a roleplaying game or a collection of ideas for fantasy novels. In this day and age the first thing most people think of when someone mentions elves is *The Lord of the Rings* or *Dungeons and Dragons*. Sure, *we're* serious about what we are—but keep in mind that the rest of the world (when they find out about us, that is) often sees us as overactive roleplayers at best and drug-addled, paranoid, delusional schizophrenics at worst. Even within the neopagan/magical community, which tends to be on the tolerant side, there's a definite note of disbelief and even ridicule among some folk.

The definition for Otherkin I will be using for this book is: a person who believes that, through either a nonphysical or (much more rarely) physical means, s/he is not entirely human. This means that anyone who relates internally to a nonhuman species either through soul, mind, body, or energetic resonance, or who believes s/he hosts such a being in hir body/mind, is in my own definition of Otherkin.

Some people do have more stringent standards. However, for the purposes of this book, I am including a wider range of people.

This is not a roleplaying game. When a person says s/he is a dragon, or a wolf, or an elf, s/he is not referring to a character that s/he only becomes during a gaming session. That which is Other is a constant part of the person; s/he is the Other at all times. Grey, a wolf therian, says it marvelously: "Perhaps I should say that if a being is a color, or a sound, I am two items merged to form a different color/sound. The two are within each other. Sometimes plain to see, sometimes deeply mixed."

Being Otherkin does not necessarily mean to deny being human. To be Otherkin is, as Jarandhel Dreamsinger says, to be "Kin to the Other." In his essay of that title, he explains how being born into a human body does not negate being Other:

A human can be adopted into a nonhuman family, or adopt nonhuman beings into their own, and establish kinship that way. The same is true for marriage. They can even inherit a nonhuman bloodline in their ancestry without considering themselves nonhuman; as many tribal cultures believe. And, of course, they can have a similar character or nature to nonhuman beings, as of kindred spirits, without being anything different than human. All of these are valid forms of kinship with the Other.⁴

I am a wolf therianthrope, someone who identifies as a wolf in some ways, but I know that my body is human. I don't have fur (no more than the average human), I can't live on raw meat alone, and I menstruate every month rather than once a year. Physical wolves will still react to me as they would any other human; I look, sound, and smell human, and I cannot change that. But the spirit of Wolf still resides within me. I've tried repressing it, and it only made me miserable. I felt like I was denying a key part of who I am, as if I was lying to myself. Eventually that part of me came welling back up despite my best efforts, and so for my balance and happiness I found that accepting it was the course for me to take.

Indeed, identifying as Otherkin is a way for us to embrace the parts of us that simply don't fit into the human paradigm. Sure, we can explain it away as imagination, but repressing anything completely inevitably leads to ill health, whether the repression is physical or psychological. We need to play, and Otherkin allows us to express that within safe boundaries. Adults enjoy having fun as much as children, though we're told that at a certain point we have to put our toys away and we can only concentrate on certain types of fun, such as sports, sex, or television. Those who engage in "idle" imagination are passed off as being immature.

⁴ Dreamsinger, 2005.

And yet being able to play with our identities is not only fun, but it also answers a deep-seated need within us. Among other animals play is simply a test run for more serious actions; young predators play to practice their hunting skills, while baby prey animals use their play to hone their own survival abilities. For Otherkin, some of what may seem to be games to the outsider—things like creating costumes that reflect our 'kin-selves, writing stories centered around our memories, or collecting images that remind us of ourselves—are tools that we use to become more comfortable with who and what we feel we are.

In some ways children have a much wiser perspective on the world than adults. To a young child, who may not yet have really developed his individual identity, the world is a much less partitioned and pigeonholed place. What is in books and on television is just as real as the child's parents, the front door, the family dog, and the child himself. Imaginations and dreams are no less relevant to the child than everyday "reality", a viewpoint that only a certain number of adults still possess. One of these was Joseph Campbell, whose works on mythology are what I believe to be essential reading for Otherkin. One particularly noteworthy idea which I find particularly relevant here is that:

Biologically, the individual organism is in no sense independent of its world. For society is not, as Ralph Linton assumed, "a group of biologically distinct and self-contained individuals."...Between the organism and its environment there exists what Piaget has termed "a continuity of exchanges."...it is only relatively slowly that a notion of individual freedom and sense of independence are developed—which then, however, may conduce not only to a manly sense of self-sufficiency...but to a deterioration of the unity of the social order as well; and to a sense of separateness, which may end in a general atmosphere of anxiety and neurosis.⁵

A perfect example of this is modern American culture. Focused primarily on the needs and desires of the individual, mainstream Americans generally have loosely knit extended families who may be scattered across the country—or even the world—and the nuclear family is less and less an influence in people's lives. Compare this to the rising number of cases of anxiety, depression, and other insecurity and stress-related disorders. While this is not the book to prove whether or not extreme individualism creates neuroses, I do believe that it's not too far a stretch to say, in this case, that there is definitely something healthy to be learned from the innocent worldview of children, so often passed off as something to be outgrown entirely.

In addition, play is the foundation of many deep roots of spirituality. Campbell explains how the suspension of disbelief through

⁵ Campbell, 1984-B, p. 81.

imagination, which is usually relegated to the realm of children, is actually the foundation for ritual. It is within the drama of ritual, whether it is the Lakshota version of the Sun Dance, the Catholic Mass, or the Wiccan Drawing Down the Moon, that "...we are to carry the point of view and spirit of man the player (*Homo ludens*) back into life; as in the play of children, where, undaunted by the banal actualities of life's meager possibilities, the spontaneous impulse of the spirit to identify itself with something other than itself for the sheer delight of play, transubstantiates the world—in which, actually, after all, things are not quite as real or permanent, terrible, important, or logical as they seem".⁶

So it is that while the imagination does indeed allow children to be children, it also allows adults that freedom as well. This is not mere escapism; it is something that is ingrained into human nature, something that can be traced far back into our genetic and social heritage.

The Otherkin community is similar to neopaganism in that for many in these subcultures, being 'kin, or being neopagan, is partially a way to embody ideal selves we discovered in childhood. Sarah M. Pike, in studying neopagans within the context of gatherings and festivals, dedicates an entire chapter to how much of neopagan culture is shaped by our experiences as children:

Neopagans' childhood stories are narratives of loss and redemption in which childhood embodies the storytellers' most profound ideals and desires. Neopagans tell each other that innocent appreciation of nature and sensitivity to the supernatural characterized their childhood. As they were socialized into a predominantly Christian culture, they say they lost these qualities, only to regain them when, as adults, they discovered Neopaganism and began to draw on cultural traditions that resonated with their childhood world. Neopagans also tell each other that the world should be as they remember seeing it as children, and that childhood experiences play a central role in who they are now [emphasis hers].⁷

In light of this, we should take into consideration that a large portion of the Otherkin community reported feeling "different" as children, as well as often being entranced by stories, toys, and other things that related to our Other selves. In fact, it's not uncommon for 'kin to say that we always knew we were not human from an early age, but never had a name for it or a safe way to express it after a certain age. While not all Otherkin—or neopagans—agree with Pike's assertion, it is a very common trend among both subcultures.

⁶ Campbell, 1984-B, p. 28-29

⁷ Pike, 2001, p. 157

The Otherkin identity is a safe haven for us to express the aspects of ourselves that don't fit into the everyday world but that need to have a place nonetheless. Does it really matter, in the end, if it's all in our heads? If it brings contentment, pleasure, and even enlightenment without causing harm to ourselves and to others, where is the wrong in it? Certainly some may question our sanity, but if we are able to function well within whatever culture we reside in, where is the harm in eccentricity?

Being Otherkin gives us a structure upon which to build the parts of us that human society offers us no resources for. Regardless of what the origin of our desires, memories, and patterns are, they are there, and in order for us to be truly healthy individuals we need to accept them and allow them a place in our lives that neither impedes everyday functions nor forces us to repress what we see as fundamental parts of ourselves.

All this talk of play and children and imagination should not be misconstrued as a way of passing off the idea of Otherkin as having no foundation in what we often term "reality"—that which is mundane, physical, tangible. Rather, its effects are similar to that of religion. The vast majority of people who profess a particular faith do not make it the entirety of their lives. While they may believe fully in such intangible ideas as transubstantiation or guardian angels, they still maintain everyday physical lives with families, jobs, and so forth. However, their beliefs often do influence everyday choices. A person who believes very strongly in Jesus Christ's example of feeding the poor may choose to donate time or money to a soup kitchen. Likewise, a parent who follows his Christian churches' railings against homosexuality may disown a child who comes out as gay or lesbian. These people may believe very literally in what their bible says—that Jesus Christ did indeed live on Earth for three decades and perform acts of kindness, or that the Christian God hates anyone who isn't heterosexual, and his followers should do the same.

So it is with Otherkin. Believing one is a dragon (and I choose the word belief both for comparison purposes and because of a lack of indisputable proof) may not be the do-all and end-all of someone's life. However, a person's belief that s/he is a reincarnated dragon may influence—consciously or not—behaviors or personality traits. Someone who identifies as a Western dragon, for example, may collect jewelry or other shiny objects and be quite picky as to who may handle them, while a person who believes himself to have once been an Eastern dragon may be fond of intellectual conversation and the pursuit of wisdom.

And again, the use of the word "belief" should not automatically place the idea of Otherkin firmly into the realms of the mind. While there's no "Otherkin religion", the function of belief is similar. A person

who believes s/he was an elf in a past life may believe it literally and spend time attempting to recall memories of that life, just as a Christian believes who that Jesus Christ was an actual historical figure as well as the literal human manifestation of God may venerate him as such. On the other hand there are Otherkin who believe that being Other is a metaphorical reality, and I have met very liberal Christians who believe that a lot of Biblical material is allegory rather than history.

Belief is (as far as we know!) uniquely human on this planet. Even the most solid reality is subject to belief--we believe that what we observe with our five physical senses is "true", even though we ultimately have no proof that we aren't being deluded by a higher/outer power. Many scientific "truths" have been proven "wrong" on numerous occasions--we believed, several centuries ago in a geocentric universe based on the "proof" we had at the time, though later "proof" supported the heliocentric galaxy. And both the theory of relativity and quantum physics have been turning the laws of Newtonian mechanics on their heads.

Belief plays a much greater role in shaping reality than many people give it credit for. "Reality" as a whole is basically a group consensus of beliefs. While it might be difficult to test the theory to the extent of, for example, convincing everyone in the world that, say, water is flammable and then trying to light it on fire to see if group belief really does work, the power of belief is much more evident on a more personal level. We can believe ourselves into sickness or health, success or failure—attitude plays a large part in our choices and subsequent actions. And for many Otherkin, believing we are Other helps us to have a healthier outlook overall because we are accepting that part of ourselves rather than repressing it. We shape our reality through our beliefs about who and what we are; beliefs manifest into attitudes, which shape our actions and determine our contentment both on a microcosmic and macorcosmic level.

What, Exactly, is "Awakening"?

Awakening is the term used to describe the realization of the parts of yourself that are not 100% human. Almost everyone who answered a survey for this book stated that Awakening was a gradual process rather than a singular event. Many Otherkin said that they'd pretty much always known to some extent or another that they weren't quite like everyone else, and discovering terminology and other people with similar views just solidified what they'd always suspected. Very few actually had a sudden, earth-shattering experience that caused their worldview to violently shift in the direction of "I'm an elf!" Even those who had a personal initiation tended to report quiet, undramatic experiences.

Awakening commonly occurs in one's teens or twenties, though it's quite possible to experience it at any age. Many people Awaken during a time in their life when they're already engaged in self-exploration. The nonhuman aspects make themselves more apparent as the person digs into hir psyche, prompting queries of "What the hell is this?" The answer may be pretty obvious once they put the pieces of the puzzle together, or it may require more research and introspection.

Occasionally someone who experiences more than one Awakening will experience each in a different manner. Such was the case for Rythen Eugea: "For years I have joked that I was a reincarnated wolf. It didn't hit me until someone mentioned memories of being a Dragon. I thought about this, and started to feel real to me. Awakening as a Phoenix just happened one day, it was a quick awakening that did hurt a bit."

Awakening, it should be noted, doesn't necessarily have defined starting and ending points. Jarandhel Dreamsinger puts it very well in his writings about his own Awakening as an elf:

*I don't believe in the black and white division of Awakened and Unawakened. I'm still remembering more...still on the path of Awakening...still learning from my memories and integrating what I learn into who I am here and now. As time goes by, often my interpretation and understanding of the facts change...and that's part of Awakening too.*⁸

Awakening really is an ongoing process. Just because your first suspicions point to one type of 'kin doesn't mean that you should ignore later evidence of being a different sort of 'kin. I commonly see within the therian community the experience of a person identifying initially with one species of animal, only to reconsider once s/he's more familiar with hir animal self. Quicksilver, a feline therian, had just such an experience:

I went through a lot of debate about who I was, and what I was, and whether or not I was being crazy, childish, or just following a fad. In fact, I started out thinking I was a wolf because that was the only thing I knew at the time. I still feel some of the canine aspects, but not so much anymore. I went through periods of doubt, distress, and points where I even stopped thinking about it just because it was such a hassle to try and sort it out. Eventually, through personal thoughts, psychology books, and spirituality books, I came to terms with a very foggy image I'm still working out.

⁸ Dreamsinger, 2003

A common feature of Awakening is what I like to call the belief-doubt-belief cycle. This consists of discovering that you're not entirely human in some manner, believing wholeheartedly in it for a while—and then the doubts creep in. This might then be followed by a period of deep questioning and even denial. Eventually, though, most people come out of it with a better idea of who and what they identify as and why. Rumor, a dragon, is a good example:

My awakening sucked. It was a slow and painful process. At least, it was for the first few years... I couldn't shake my sense of identification with dragons, though it made no sense to me. I felt like I was a dragon on some level... I found other people on the internet who did as well. The idea was earth-shattering. I had never considered there might be others. And I was willing to believe them, but with typical teenage low self-confidence and identity confusion not that it was true of me.

Rather than embracing the idea, I distanced myself from dragons and dragon people... I outright tried to suppress things dragon about me, figuring that if it wasn't really there, then no harm done, and if it was there, it would survive the efforts... This didn't work, and here I am today. I do regret that I took such a masochistic approach to evaluating my identity, but I'm not unhappy with where I am now. Now, it's mostly a sort of quiet sense of wonder.

I've occasionally seen discussions on how many Otherkin there are in the world, which leads to pondering of the number of unAwakened Otherkin are out there. I've seen estimates as high as "one quarter of the world's population", based on people's assumptions about past lives and other influences. My thought is that being Otherkin hinges on conscious identity. It really doesn't matter whether someone is 'kin or not, if they don't actually acknowledge that part of themselves. I have met pagans who claim lives as animals and other nonhuman beings—but those lives and their corresponding identities don't noticeably affect their current realities. With Otherkin, being Other, whether it was through another life or genetics or metaphor, affects them on a daily basis. So, at least partially, Otherkin does depend on conscious identity as the Other. I suppose there are always the cases of people who act as if they're something Other (or whose Otherkin friends accuse them of it) but are unAwakened; unless they go through the Awakening process themselves, there's really no way to say for sure, and so these cases shouldn't be taken as part of a precise Otherkin headcount.

As to the exact number of Otherkin, while we're on the subject, your guess is as good as mine. I collected surveys for over a year and got less than 150; the most I've ever heard of another researcher getting is around 400. Neither one of these numbers even begins to cover the entire population. Considering how reluctant many Otherkin are to tell

anyone they don't know well about what they are, trying to get an exact number would be just about impossible.

The Otherkin Community/Subculture

I tend to refer to Otherkin collectively either as a community or a subculture. It is a community in that it is a group of people with similar interests who seek each other's company to one degree or another; it is a subculture in the sense that it is a splinter of modern post-industrial/information-based culture, particularly that which has grown up around the internet. I use these words interchangeably as I feel both are appropriate ways to label this group. However, I also use them loosely, as 'kin are not particularly organized as a whole (though individual informal and formal groups do exist) and many prefer a lack of central organization. In addition, there are 'kin who really want nothing to do with the bulk of Otherkin in general, choosing perhaps to socialize with a few friends who happen to also be 'kin. While some people do seek standardization of certain terms or concepts, there's no central authority on what Otherkin are and aren't; even this book is meant more as a set of guidelines and examples than as the Rules for Being Otherkin. Most of the information and discussion surrounding 'kin has a highly individualistic focus to it, as opposed to following set standards and expectations of what makes someone Otherkin. Keep in mind that while "community" and "subculture" can be used to describe Otherkin, we are not a monolithic group in any form.

As most of the information on Otherkin at this time stems from the internet, it's entirely possible that there are people who could be described as Otherkin who are unaware of the existence of others like them because they don't have internet access. Additionally, the Otherkin subculture seems to be primarily a Western phenomenon, as the majority of us are in North America, and to a lesser extent Europe. However, if there's a correlating identity in other areas of the world, it's not particularly well-known. And as I mentioned before, there's the question of "unAwakened" 'kin who are completely unaware of any nonhuman influence in themselves, or who chalk any early experiences up to childhood imagination. There's also the fact that nobody's sure just how many closeted 'kin there are, those who are aware but unwilling to talk about it. Finally, there are those who identify as something other than human, but who either choose to avoid the dramatics that sometimes result in the subculture, or who refuse to associate themselves with the word Otherkin at all. Sirius made the following observation:

Although most others would consider me otherkin, I certainly do not, due to the fact that most "otherkin" use it only as a crutch to escape their boring, lonely lives. I think, on the whole, [they] are based on isolation and alienation and too much D&D, that the majority of people who claim to be as such merely do it in order to make themselves feel special. Hence, I check myself on a very frequent basis. A real problem is that many use this to escape reality, which is, as you can imagine, not a good thing. It is quite difficult, as the majority of the so-called community is internet based--sure, there are gatherings and the like, but a major problem exists in that most people discover us online. Most of those who do get involved are therefore people who are alienated from others and our society, which leads to many people not being all that serious about this, and just using it as a crutch.

Among those who do actively identify as Otherkin, some types are more common than others. Elves, dragons, and therianthropes tend to be the most numerous, and of the latter, wild canines and felines are the most represented. Angels and demons are relatively scarce, as are certain types of fey such as satyrs and phoukas. While cynics may say that Otherkin simply choose flashier alter egos, most 'kin simply ignore them and continue with their own explorations. We can only speculate why it is that there are more elves than trolls.

It could be that certain types of beings "translate" into human form better, if we take the idea the Otherkin are reincarnated from nonhuman lives. Perhaps elves are closer in mindset to humans than orcs, and so incarnate into human form easily because they're more able to transit from the one mindset to the other. Psychologically speaking, we understand and relate to certain archetypes and beings more than others; we may find wolves and bears more familiar (or at least aesthetically appealing) than frogs or field mice. There's the possibility, too, that some lives simply imprint more heavily than others on our psyches. Karl, who identifies different aspects of himself as canine and sylvan, makes a good point: "I think the knowledge that can be passed between our lives or is reawakened mostly involves the formation of our identities. *Even when specific events are available they are the ones that were important to the formation of identity.* Language is important to our perceptions but doesn't have a large influence in our core identities (emphasis mine)." While this quote was originally in reference to the retention of language from life to life, it has a much broader application, in my opinion.

Semantics may also have something to do with it; if a person possesses an intelligent but animal "energy" that doesn't quite resonate with mundane animals, s/he may be more likely to identify it with "dragon" than the lesser-known "gryphon" (This may explain the influx of gryphon-identified Otherkin after the publication of Mercedes Lackey's *Valdemar* series of fantasy novels, which featured intelligent

gryphons. Some say it was because the books served to Awaken more gryphonkin; others argue that it just resulted in a lot more wannabes.). There's also the case of canine therianthropes, who outnumber all other types. If we study the history of human development in relation to wolves and the domestication of the dog, it's likely that we learned a good deal of our social structure, once we went from being arboreal scavengers to terrestrial hunter-gatherers, from wild social canines such as wolves and African wild dogs. As social canines are the nonprimate whose pack hierarchy most resembles our own way of relating to each other, it could be that for many of us the first animal that we attach meaning to when we exhibit feral tendencies would be those whose behaviors translate most easily to our own. This idea may explain why it's fairly common for a therian to assume hir animal side is a wolf, even if s/he is actually another animal. This confusion may be further compounded by the fact werewolf lore is the most prevalent of all shapeshifter mythos in the places where therians are most common. Whether conscious or not, a newly Awakened therian may assume that hir animal is a wolf simply because of the cultural connection between wolves and shapeshifting.

Of course, just being a big, flashy being doesn't necessarily mean you're entirely happy about it. There are assumptions made, after a while, that those who claim to be the most popular 'kin, like wolves, elves and dragons, are just pretending. Faolan Ruadh, a wolf therian, says "I often wish it had been Pangolin or Hyena or Cockroach or Pigeon that I'd been drawn to, since so many people identify with large, aesthetically-pleasing carnivores and to express alliance with Wolf is to invite people to think of you as a thoughtless New Age nutjob with infantile power issues." While some people may see someone's 'kin side as something really cool and enviable, s/he may not feel the same way. Ravenari explains, "My awakening to Raven was difficult...They were loud, unwieldy, ugly birds to me...Raven was nothing but a pest, it didn't help that many of my family members who have 'raven' as a family totem, are unsavoury, unlikeable people."

Many people with common 'kin selves do thoroughly question themselves, sometimes particularly so because they want to be sure they're not just settling on the first possible choice. However, it's also important to avoid a "truer-than-thou" contest as people argue as to who of the elves, dragons, and therianthropes are real, and who are the posers supposedly swelling the ranks and skewing the data. It's enough to say, I believe, that the "why" of numbers is nowhere near as important as the "why" of individuals.

A Day in the Life of Otherkin

Otherkin don't always advertise as such to non-'kin. We don't have "I am an elf/dragon/wolf" tattooed on our foreheads (though some of us have more discreet tattoos that are related to being 'kin); those who dress for their 'kin selves usually are assumed to be parts of other subcultures, such as pagans, goths, or hippies. Coming out of the 'kin closet is generally reserved for people who are known to be 'kin-friendly. In the event that Otherkin come out to people who are completely clueless about us, the reaction can be pretty underwhelming. It's a rare case when someone actually gets a serious negative reaction (and being told you're weird or crazy doesn't count). I've yet to hear of anyone being forcibly institutionalized, drugged, disowned, or otherwise abused for coming out as 'kin. The worst that tends to happen is teasing and gossip.⁹ This isn't to say that worse situations can't and don't happen, but for the most part they're pretty rare (For more information on coming out, please see Chapter 9, "So You Think You're Otherkin").

That being said, most 'kin lead pretty normal lives. We hold jobs, raise families, have hobbies, and most of us blend into society pretty well. We come from a variety of backgrounds and lifestyles. There does appear to be a high proportion of overlap with other subcultures. For example, there are a lot of geeks among Otherkin, which may lead outsiders to believe we're all wrapped up in anime, technological advances, specialized intellectual pursuits, and we all work in computer-related fields. While this is true for some, keep in mind also that the bulk of Otherkin information is internet-based, and so the community tends toward the computer-friendly. Still, trying to typecast all Otherkin as geeks (or by any other subcultural label) is pretty futile and does a disservice to those who don't fit the stereotype. Those who are open-minded enough to accept the idea of Otherkin tend to also accept and even embrace other subcultures, but this doesn't mean that all 'kin like to buck the system.

So how does being 'kin affect everyday life? Not nearly so much as you'd think. Otherkin status doesn't automatically make a person vastly different from the rest of the world. Usually it's more a matter of the nonhuman traits coloring the perception. Sa'arine, who describes herself as "elvenmix", relates, "It makes too much logical sense as to why I am the way I am. I have not changed who I am; I merely have come to understand why."

⁹ If you're Otherkin and complaining about being persecuted, check out <http://www.gender.org/remember/>, which is an online memorial for people who have been murdered for being transgendered. Kind of puts things in perspective, doesn't it?

As a wolf therian, if I have a (nonphysical) conflict with a person, I don't jump on the person and start biting them (which I'd imagine, for those of you who've seen me in person, would probably be an amusing if mildly disturbing sight). I do, however, very much dislike feeling cornered as any wild animal would. If I feel threatened in any way, physical or otherwise, and I'm alone, I'm going to do my best to get out of the situation—a wolf away from his pack is not going to do something stupid like take on a neighboring pack all by himself if s/he has the chance to get away instead (Animals have much better senses of self-preservation than a lot of humans.).

Often the perception isn't even that dramatic. Being Otherkin doesn't necessarily mean exhibiting traits that are wholly alien to humans, but that the nonhuman viewpoint colors the perception of the person, affecting what choice s/he makes in regards to a specific situation. Casteylan and Arhuaine, who are two elves in a multiple system, simply have different opinions of this world:

This is one of the areas in which Arhuaine and I are completely different in opinion. She hates this world, I love it. To me it's a great adventure. After spending the last 600-odd years tramping about in the mud, being wet and hungry a lot of the time, it's nice to be able to stroll down to the shops to get food. I love the technology, the toys. We live in a city now, which Arhuaine hates but tolerates for practical reasons, but I love the buzz and life here. It may not be my world, but I'm certainly going to enjoy it while I'm here. Also the job we have now is mine. Arhuaine had drifted from one job to another and hating [sic] them all. About 3 years ago she started looking for something new, and put in loads of applications with local agencies. One that came up was telemarketing, working in a callcentre. She knew she'd hate it, but wanted the interview practise anyway. Within ten minutes of seeing the place she knew she'd not be able to stand it, so she ducked out and left me fronting for the rest of the interview. And I aced the interview and was offered the job on the spot. It turns out that I'm a natural at sales, I love the job and three years on I'm still there, on the promotion ladder and earning very nice bonuses. It is very much my job; Arhuaine takes no part in it and since I've been working there I find that I'm fronting a lot more than I used to. (Casteylan)

Arhuaine confirms this with "I am extremely happy with that arrangement. The less time I have to spend in this world, the better I like it."

Indeed, the differences in perception can be frustrating. Some Otherkin dislike modern society partially (or wholly) because of how being 'kin affects the way they view that society. A badger therianthrope named Mud Paw expresses her feelings on her environment in regards to her being 'kin: "It does affect my career, home and socialization choices. I cannot be in a career that is heavily dependent on working

with people in any way...My home is very uncomfortable most of the time...I wish I had the ability to just go live in the mountains and live off of the land, though that [is] easier said than done." Other people, though seem to have integrated being 'kin with being human; Kaijima, a dragon, says:

I have stated on a number of occasions that regardless of what I called myself - Otherkin, therianthrope, dragon, or nothing at all - it would not change who I am and the way that I think...It's difficult for me to single out any particular way in which being what I am affects my life because it is my life. I live in a culture engineered by human beings on a world populated by human beings; so as you might expect, I do a lot of the things any other human being does. I think that identifying myself as I do, has led me to desire a more objective look at human culture and practices that might be otherwise taken for granted. It has also led me to look at the ideas and the ideals of concepts such as transhumanism [a movement that supports using technology, medical and otherwise, to enhance the human body and prolong the lifespan].

Emma, like many 'kin, allows herself time just to be her wolf-self: "Just because of the tradition I go out howling every full moon. I'm not really affected by it, but it feels good to have an evening set aside for being wolf". Many 'kin find such periodic releases to be good ways to keep the balance between Human and Other.

There are Otherkin for whom Awakening is an improvement. Korak, a jaguar therian, is one of these:

...my perspective has indeed changed- I've become far more aware of the intelligence and sentience of animals, for one thing. I have become far more loving and considerate of others, especially animals. I am no longer as shallow and materialistic. (I don't even own a television!)... I will say that my therianthropy has driven me to choose the kind of life most appropriate for a nature loving pagan therian... Animals do tend to sense a difference about me, felines are especially affectionate. I once had a friend's cat jump into my lap on the first visit to her house. Nothing sounds strange about that until you know that this cat is so timid that it took over a month for the woman's boyfriend to pet the cat.

Korak is not alone in his experience with the cat. A noticeable portion of the survey respondents replied that they either were able to do things like approach animals safely that most others couldn't, or on the opposite end of the spectrum, seemed universally reviled by animals. A few stated that they got both reactions at different times, but never just a neutral one. Faolan Ruadh has one possible explanation for this:

Animals tend to treat me differently than they do most, and have since I was very young, according to my folks. My mom in particular speculates that it's a biochemistry thing--I smell different. I think it's simply that my respect for animals translated to behavior toward them that they did not perceive as threatening, and that as I got older, I learned to communicate with them on their terms via posture, movement, and tone of voice. It's not telepathy-- more like learning a foreign language. Other people tend to sense me as "different", though their reactions to that vary significantly.

The latter mirrors my own experiences; I have worked with animals, particularly dogs, most of my life, and have learned quite a lot about the vocal and body language of canines in particular, which helps me out greatly when dealing with them. However, these should not be taken as "proof" of being Otherkin, as non-'kin may also experience consistent extreme reactions from animals¹⁰.

Some Otherkin have had other people pick up on what they are without any outward signs, something that many of the survey respondents reported. While most often this happens with Otherkin and children, other adults may also notice something "different" about someone who is 'kin. Knife-Smile, who identifies both canine and draconic aspects, says that:

Humans, though, react the most to me. Some are repelled, some are attracted, and some just sense me and don't know what the hell to do about it. In high school, one of the few people willing to talk to me said people saw me as 'a force of nature' (direct quote). I've also been likened to a storm, even though all I typically did was show up, sit at my preferred computer, do my work, and leave, pretty much speaking only when spoken to. Certain types of people are definitely drawn to me, and not all of them have much in common with me. So my contacts and friends are fairly diverse... they can always tell something is 'off' about me, and some of them can make very accurate guesses with very little information. I don't know if that's because I broadcast particularly powerfully or if they're particularly receptive. No way to really be sure. But it happens, unquestionably.

Sometimes it is the microcosm rather than the macrocosm that is problematic. Species dysphoria is feeling displaced in a human body when you feel you should be in an entirely different, nonhuman one. One therianthrope, named C. "Defilerwurm" Sims says: "I've never felt right referring to myself as human...I've always felt wrong in human skin, felt there's something else to the equation." In the case of the

¹⁰ Check out my essay "Wild Cousins" in the therianthropy essays section of <http://www.house-eclipse.org> for some thoughts about what might happen if a non-domesticated therian met his wild counterpart.

Shards, the collective name of people in one particular multiple system, different members of a system may have different reactions:

We are, by and large, not terribly comfortable with this body because it does not match what we feel like perfectly (in some cases, at all), but in absence of a means of resculpting this body at will, we deal with it. The body still has glitches: Bad joints, muscles that cramp up, misjudging reach of arms because they are shorter than we are used to, bad vision (nearsighted, with astigmatism, though rather good night vision), sensitive hearing (very loud noises cause the body to involuntarily double over because our control channels were disrupted by sensory overload).

While full dysphoria is relatively rare, it is not uncommon for 'kin to experience periodic bouts of "not feeling quite right" in their bodies. This may manifest as something as simple as momentarily expecting a limb to move or look differently, or catching a glance of yourself in the mirror and seeing a human face where you were thinking a different one ought to be. Meirya, a hawk therianthrope, describes how a mental shapeshift can bring about a different perception of the physical human body:

Sometimes the legs join in, too, making walking difficult, awkward. On the toes now, because the foot is shaped wrong; balls of the feet is right is natural is normal, and it's not the balls I'm walking on because this is the foot's sole, what do you mean I'm on tip-toe? Legs like the arm-wings, disproportionate, turned wrong, they're supposed to fold this way, and it's not supposed to be so long from this joint to that, and it's supposed to be longer from that joint to this. Toes curl, become claws; agitation rakes the earth, or the insides of wrong-fitting shoes, clenches as if to grasp tree limb or skittering mouse.

Gender dysphoria also occurs among Otherkin, as some may identify more with the sex (physical) and gender (personality/identity) of their Other selves than of their human selves, particularly if they are reincarnated and still resonate strongly with the Other life. When I first met Solo and Duo, twin kitsune who inhabit the same body, at the Otherkin gathering Walking the Thresholds in 2005, I assumed their body was as male as they were. Between clothing, mannerisms, voice, and even energy signature, they passed perfectly as male. I didn't find out until several months later that the body itself is biologically female. They're definitely a case in which spirits heavily affect the physical form they inhabit.

Arhuaine says that sometimes sharing a female body with a male soul can lead to the different souls affecting the body and mannerisms individually: "[Our] body is female and aged 38. Casteylan is male and when he's fronting (i.e.; has control of the body) he prefers to present

gender as male. Consequently in our outside life we have a reputation for being somewhat genderqueer". Still, there are plenty of 'kin whose Other selves match their human selves as far as sex and gender go. And some 'kin may have had lives in which their sex and/or gender varied from this one, but they still identify with their current lives' "default settings".

Some Otherkin are not limited in their sex and gender attributes to male or female, masculine or feminine. The Shards run the entire spectrum of sex and gender: "Some of us identify as male, some as female. A few identify as sexless or androgynous. The latter categories confess a lack of understanding of sexual dimorphism, by and large." For my part, I am biologically female, but I identify as genderfluid androgynous. This means that some days I identify as male, some as female, but most of the time I'm comfortably in the middle ground. It's not entirely based on my being 'kin, but that does have an affect on my being rather genderqueer myself. I figure that if I'm a product of reincarnation, my soul itself is a complete blank slate, and any deviations from that result from experiences with various lives, the present one included.

Dysphoria is not a terribly common condition, though; most Otherkin tend to be pretty settled in their bodies. "I'm about as comfortable with this body as one can be, I suppose. I don't see the point of whining about the unique opportunity I've been given to live another life here and to experience everything I can in life once again... I treasure the opportunity," says Áine, who is Tuatha de Danaan.

While Otherkin are physically human, energetic/etheric/astral/otherwise nonphysical bodies are a different story. The original concept of phantom limbs derived from the experience of amputees who could still feel their missing limbs. While Western medical science generally explains this through sense memory and says it's strictly in the head, metaphysics explains it as the presence of body parts that are not there physically, but exist on other levels. In addition, there's a difference between medical phantom limb syndrome and the phenomenon among Otherkin, as Faolan Ruadh explains:

My "hackles" raise when I'm defensive or angry, and I occasionally experience myself as "having" thick, blunt nails and paw pads for running and digging when I'm doing those things, or larger ears and a tail when I'm being emotive and social, but I consider those to be things that are also in the realm of human experience or synaesthetic add-ons that my psyche provides to help me make sense of things, not phantom limbs. Actual phantom limbs involve neurological white noise- as a result, they hurt (emphasis hers).

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In Otherkin, phantom limbs often consist of body parts that were present in their Other selves, but not in the human body. Wings, tails, and other nonhuman appendages are common, as are variations on body shape, such as wolf ears on the nonphysical form of a lupine therianthrope. They can sometimes manifest rather early in life, even before full Awakening; however, unlike most products of a child's imagination, these tend to continue later in life. Kitsula, a fox therian, says that "I had first felt my tail in my childhood (my second memory from this life was me trying to insist I had a tail), and when I was in Junior High School I remember sitting in a chair relaxing and entering an meditative state where I felt my ears, tail, and muzzle". Phantom limbs aren't always directly associated with being Otherkin, as in the case of Skatche, an elf: "I personally seem to have falcon wings on my energy body, but this is perhaps due to some shamanic practice in a long-forgotten life - I do not think I ever actually had physical wings".

While for the most part phantom limbs have a nonphysical existence, there are the rare claims of them affecting physical reality. Occasionally a phantom limb may react to a physical obstacle in the same way that a flesh and blood limb would, and there are anecdotes that involve people (usually children) being able to see "invisible" wings, tails and so forth. Nobody has tried getting 'kin to consistently make this happen on a formal research level, though I've heard of a few who have experimented on their own, having other people touch their phantom limbs while they were blindfolded or had their eyes closed to see if they'd notice. I'd imagine any attempt to run a formal experiment would end up being like tests to prove psychic ability. The people who want to see the glass as half full will point only at the successes, while the half-empty people will concentrate on the failures.

Obviously, the phantom limb syndrome can be "explained away" by skeptics as being, again, all in the head. This is part of why personal experience is central to being Otherkin. You just can't explain that your phantom tail exists to someone who is of the "seeing is believing" camp. In fact, it's probably best not to try to "prove" to non-'kin that Otherkin exist by using phantom limbs as the evidence. Chances are the non-'kin will be wondering just what it is you've been smoking (and, perhaps, why you're not sharing). In addition, while those who claim psychic or magical sensitivity may say they "see" your tail or wings, keep in mind that if this occurs after they know you're 'kin, there's a much greater chance that they're just seeing what they wish to see—or what you want them to see.

Interpersonal relationships, particularly with non-'kin, vary, as does how uncloseted each person is about hir Other self. I received a broad spectrum of responses to questions about being "out of the 'kin closet", ranging from "I'm out to everyone! Well, almost everyone..." to

"Nobody knows, and I prefer to keep it that way". There's really not too much of a pattern; everyone seems to have his own preferences based on his relationships and circumstances.

Illanou, a wolf therian, says that although her friends and family know she adores wolves and sometimes notice her lupine behaviors, she hasn't told anyone about being a wolf therianthrope. Salaiek Tuar'ann, a dragon, remarks, "I'm only very slightly closeted about being 'kin. My parents know, my closest friends know, and other 'kin I've met know, obviously. There are quite a few people who know me that I haven't told though, because I know that they'd rather not have to deal with it, or wouldn't be able to handle it". Raki, on the other hand, is less open:

I'm very closeted about it. I've only ever told one non-'kin who I knew in person, and that was because it was my first romantic relationship, and I thought it was appropriate to show trust (it turned out to be a terrible decision, and a worse relationship, but eh, we all make mistakes).

I don't trust easily, and most of the people I know wouldn't take it well. They have no framework for understanding it, and they'd assume I was being histrionic by telling them.

As for the reactions of others, there's a lot of variance there, too. Rhyannon, who describes herself as a Shadow Faery, says, "I'm the sort of person who can't really keep anything to herself (unless I promise someone else that I will) so a lot of my friends know. I don't think most of them believe me, but it doesn't change our friendships. They all thought I was weird before they knew, anyway, this is just another thing for them to shake their heads at". The Silver Elves display a variety of openness and reactions:

Zardoa and Silver Flame are as out as you can get. We tell everyone. Solon and Elantari, as we said, do not call themselves elves to anyone but us, they simply live their own creative lives being their own true S'elves, which is how we raised them to be. We tell everyone that we are elves and reactions differ. Zardoa, particularly in the early years knew people who were very sceptical who later, upon knowing him awhile, would suddenly exclaim, "You really are an elf!" That reaction still occurs from time to time.

Mora Zoranokov, on the other hand, has had a lot of bad reactions when she's talked about being a vampire among pagans. The people she spoke with had a number of misconceptions and she had a tough time dispelling them. This has caused her to be much more cautious about talking about her vampirism. She notes:

It's funny how people will bash vampires until you step up and say that you are one. Their tune changes quite remarkably. It is most remarkable when people know you and have known you. They sing a much different tune. Most people don't know... and the very few who do are either vampires themselves, or I have mentioned it as an aside when they were bashing vampires or bashing someone who was out in the open about being a vampire.

Kistaro, a dragon, got a mixed bag when speaking to his campus pagan organization:

The reactions from telling people on the Silver Crescent mailing list and in person (that's the campus Pagan group) were generally positive, although there were a few notable silences (And one past member on the mailing list also going "Me too, I just never told y'all", which was interesting.). And one person who was absolutely shocked, who cornered me after the end of the meeting and asked if I had any insight onto why she felt like she had wings and had for a quite some time.

Sa'arine shares the thoughts of a lot of Otherkin when she mentions. "I'm pretty circumspect about who I tell. I have to be pretty sure they'll either have a positive reaction or keep quiet about it before I'll tell them. I have enough to deal with without causing more for myself". Still, as mentioned earlier, coming out as Otherkin generally doesn't result in physical violence or attempts at forced institutionalization; one might imagine that the overall tendency towards wise choices in confidants helps keep the drama factor low.

Historical and Mythological Precedents for Otherkin

The idea of physical beings possessed of superhuman or nonhuman abilities living alongside *Homo sapiens* is as old as mythology itself. As Frazer wrote, "The notion of a man-god, or of a human being endowed with divine or supernatural powers, belongs essentially to that earlier period of religious history in which gods and men are still viewed as beings of much the same order, and before they are divided by the impassable gulf which, to later thought, opens out between them".¹¹ Such people tended to be associated with the ability to blight or fertilize crops, cause or cease rain, and give out blessings or curses. They often lived apart from their community, and sacrifices were made to them in the same manner as with incorporeal deities. However, what set them apart from being shamans or hermits was the belief that they were deities incarnate and were treated as such.

¹¹ Frazer, 1993, p. 92.

One of the best-known examples of deity incarnate is Vishnu, who lived ten mortal lives through various avatars. Some of these were in animal form, including a fish, a boar, and a tortoise, as well as a lion-man. The rest were human, including the great hero Rama, and the Buddha himself (though this is not agreed upon by Buddhism). One, named Kalki, is yet to come, remaining within the ranks of incarnated deities and saviors for whom groups of devoted humans wait.¹²

This is a different idea from possession, in which an entity temporarily takes over the body of a devotee, whether to speak to the crowd assembled or to simply enjoy wearing human flesh. Voodoo is one of the best-known examples. In this Afro-Caribbean religion, the loa, who are intermediaries between God and humanity, possess random people attending the ritual; often they enjoy food, drink and dance through the person's body. Modern Norse pagans have resurrected the practice of *Seithr*, a divinatory practice in which various deities are invoked, causing a great shaking of the body; this and related practices may be read about in Jan Fries' *Seidways: Shaking, Swaying and Serpent Mysteries*. While these examples are not exact incarnations of deities and spirits, they do show that it is possible for such entities to inhabit the mortal form, albeit temporarily. The traditions that use possession generally don't include instances in which the external entity decides to stay for good; however, possession is an extremely widespread phenomenon, and may account for at least some of the instances of incarnate deities discussed by Frazer.

In some religions there exists the idea that deities are, in the end, mortal, and that a certain name or title is inherited. Indigenous people of Greenland worshipped a primary deity who could be killed by the wind or a dog, and they were shocked when missionaries tried to explain that Yahweh was, indeed, immortal. An American Indian of unspecified tribe, when asked about the Great Spirit that created the earth, replied "the Great Spirit that made the world is dead long ago. He could not possibly have lived as long as this", further implying that there was still a current Great Spirit. The Egyptian and Babylonian deities, too, had limited lifespans in their respective cultures; the former even had certain physical mummies attributed to them.¹³ So if deities and other superhuman entities can die, as humans do, can they also reincarnate, as many believe humans do as well?

The answer, for some philosophies, is yes. Deities that reincarnate often return to the same family line repeatedly, making it somewhat of an inherited condition. The Dalai Lama of Tibetan Buddhism is the most famous example. Believed to be the reincarnated

¹² Wingu, 1991, p. 51-52

¹³ Frazer, 1993, p. 264-5

Buddha, this spiritual leader, upon death, reincarnates into the body of a male child in Tibet. The monks of the temple scour the land in search of this child; when they find him, they test him by showing him a number of holy items, and then asking him which ones he recognizes from his previous incarnation.¹⁴ The Buddha is not, per se, a deity, but neither is he purely human, having reached enlightenment.

Much like a lot of Otherkin today, some of these gods-on-earth were known to bring their physical vessel as close to resembling the divine form as possible: "A Hindoo (sic) sect...holds that its spiritual chiefs or Maharajas, as they are called, are representatives or even actual incarnations on earth of the god Krishna...[they] make over their bodies, their souls, and what is perhaps still more important, their worldly substance to his adorable incarnations..."¹⁵ The Egyptian pharaohs, too, were considered to be divine by office, and as dynasties followed families, again this divinity was passed on.¹⁶

Rebirth and reincarnation were not limited solely to deities and humans. In many traditional conceptions of this process, the soul could become any number of things. Campbell relates one account from India, in which those who die, pass from smoke through wind and other gaseous, ethereal compounds, take some time to rest in a temporary respite, then filter back down to the Earth through similar means until at last they are born into a physical body whose character is determined by their conduct in the previous life.¹⁷ This body need not be human. The Garuda Purana, a sacred Hindu text, includes this: "Who steals food becomes a rat; who steals grain becomes a locust...perfumes, a muskrat; honey, a gadfly; flesh, a vulture; and salt, an ant...Who commits unnatural vice becomes a village pig; who consorts with a sudra woman becomes a bull; who is passionate becomes a lustful horse."¹⁸ Granted, these rebirths within the Hindu tradition are as a result of breaking certain moral codes. However, they illustrate the belief that a soul need not incarnate into the same type of body each time.

Buddhist beliefs in reincarnation also allowed for a number of possible incarnations, or *gati*, according to the state of one's karma. The three *gati* considered to be reserved for those of higher karma are gods, asuras, and humans, though not all Buddhists include asuras. On the lower end of the scale are animals, hungry ghosts, and demons. It should be noted that although asuras are often also called demons, in this particular model they are closer to the Greek conception of titans.¹⁹

¹⁴ Frazer, 1993, p. 103

¹⁵ Frazer, 1993, p. 101

¹⁶ Frazer, 1993, p. 104

¹⁷ Campbell, 1984A, p. 202

¹⁸ Garuda Purana, as quoted in Young, 1995, p. 102.

¹⁹ Flesher, 1997

A related motif is the idea of a human being raised to divine or semi-divine status. Frazer describes a myth in which the Egyptian goddess Isis began life as a human but gained her godhood through obtaining Ra's true name.²⁰ And Greek mythology is rife with mortals who were given immortal status through the will of the gods. Orion the hunter (and, some say, consort of Artemis) was taken into the sky and given eternal life by the Huntress. This gift of immortality didn't always work as expected. Sad Tithonus was granted eternal life by the goddess of the dawn, Eos, but she neglected to also gift him with eternal youth. Eventually his body shriveled so that he became the first grasshopper.²¹

Heracles (Hercules) was one of many demigods born of the union of an immortal and a human. Zeus, father of a number of out of wedlock children (both mortal and divine), seduced Alcmene by taking the form of her husband, King Amphitryon of Troezon. Heracles' extraordinary abilities inherited from his mixed status allowed him to perform his famed twelve labors.²²

While the human-into-divine motif doesn't support such theories as reincarnation, it does provide a pattern of humanity becoming more than human, something that the process of Awakening (realizing one is Otherkin) is symbolic of. In addition, the genetic-modification and personal mythology theories fit nicely into this motif.

I've yet to hear of any Otherkin claiming to be reincarnated deities today demanding worship, but keep in mind that elves, shapeshifters, dragons, and other entities were considered at least semi-divine in their cultures of origin. The Tuatha de Danaan of legend were (and in some cases still are) worshipped as gods. And many other spirits, such as angels and totem animals, gained popularity as intermediaries between humanity and the Divine. Shapeshifters in a number of cultures, whether they started out as human or not, were viewed as more than human; a number of these examples are related in Chapter 3.

Obviously some of these myths may seem rather implausible. Few actually believe that grasshoppers didn't exist prior to the transformation of Eos' lover. That particular story, though, does illustrate the mutability of the human state: that a person may metamorphose on a deep level. This opens up the idea of becoming 'kin, an unlikely but not impossible situation, which I will touch on at various points later in the text.

A more modern example stemming from the Victorian era is the idea of "deva evolution" in theosophy. Devas (known to neopagans as

²⁰ Frazer, 1993, 260-1

²¹ Bulfinch, 1981, p. 164-165

²² Graves, 1992, p. 446-448

elementals), evolve in a manner similar to that of humans. One step of this process involves the deva incarnating for a lifetime as a human.²³

A Brief History of the Modern Otherkin Community

While it would seem that the proliferation of Otherkin originated with the rise in use of the Internet, the earliest roots of what we know as today's community actually started in the 1960s²⁴. The tolerance of alternative viewpoints so common in that era allowed people who related to nonhuman characters in both ancient and modern folklore a safe place to be who they truly were. No doubt synchronicity played a part in the creation of this subculture, meaning that people in various places began seeking their nonhuman selves at roughly the same time. There's really only so much evidence, though, particularly before the 1990s.

Many of the earliest references to Otherkin were through a Tolkien-based paradigm, winding their way through song lyrics and musical personae. In the 1970s a group of elves known as the Elf Queen's Daughters popped onto the scene on the West Coast. Composed of male as well as female elves, these folk worked a lot of ecological and Goddess-friendly imagery and language in their writings. These letters sparked some of the earliest Awakenings of Otherkin and are worthy of mention in the history of the community.

While the Elf Queen's Daughters disappeared off the map as a group circa 1977, their role as purveyor of elven writings was picked up by the Silver Elves two years later.²⁵ Zardoa Silverstar had been Awakened by the Daughters in 1975, and a couple of years later helped Silver Flame to Awaken as well. Their children, Solon and Elantari Emerald Love, are also elves, and the family has been integral to the formation of the Otherkin community through their writings and other communication.

The newsletters of the Daughters seem to have for the most part been swallowed by time, but the Magical Elven Love Letters of the Silver Elves not only persist to this day but are even available in bound book format (mine even came with a gift certificate for "Five Hundred Kisses"). These letters are lyrical works of prose covering topics ranging from other types of 'kin to the Elves' own memories of their previous

²³ Bronsted, 2000. Also, thanks to Bluejay Young who originally brought this concept to my attention via a comment on my book review blog, <http://lupabitch.wordpress.com>, specifically my review on Virtue's *Earth Angels*.

²⁴ I've been informed by folks from the Otherkin Alliance (<http://www.otherkinalliance.org>) that the Starseed community also has had an influence on the formation of the Otherkin community, perhaps as early as the 1950s.

²⁵ Vashti, 2005

existences, and include a lot of what these elves interpret "elfin" to be. There's a lot more to them than the initial reading, however; rather than being strictly literal or only metaphorical, they are instead a unique blending of the two. While they don't describe the experience of every elf, they are a remarkable artifact in the young history of Otherkin.²⁶

Postal mail, telephones, and chance meetings were the primary forms of finding other 'kin until the dawn of the Internet age. As with other subcultures, the Otherkin community flourished with this new tool. The oldest internet resource is the Elfkind Digest²⁷, an email mailing list started in 1990 by R'ykandar Korra'ti at the University of Kentucky. Newsgroups such as alt.horror.werewolf and alt.fan.dragons, which came about in the early 1990s, were initially for fans of horror and fantasy, but also spawned threads on those who identified as dragons, werewolves, and other beings.²⁸

The word Otherkin itself apparently stemmed from the internet. A variant, "otherkind", was first seen on at least one of the Otherkin-related listserves in April of 1990. "Otherkin" first appeared on that same listserve the following July. However, it didn't crop up again until February of 1991.²⁹

The advent of the White Wolf roleplaying games in the 1990s also facilitated growth of the Otherkin community. This movement was partially spurred on by the popularity of the tabletop and live-action roleplaying games produced by White Wolf, inc. *Vampire: the Masquerade*, *Werewolf: the Apocalypse* and *Changeling: the Dreaming* are the three games that most affected the formation of the community. While Otherkin were quite aware that these were just games, the rich settings and design of the games, coupled with the ability to roleplay "mythical" beasts in a modern setting, attracted a strong following, Otherkin included. And, as with the newsgroups, the subject matter of the games led to the inevitable wonderings "Well, what if this was real? What if there really were werewolves, and vampires, and faeries in our day and age?" Most players likely simply shrugged it off as a passing fancy. However, many Otherkin found that these flights of fancy could open up opportunities to discuss more serious approaches to the idea of nonhumans in a human world.

Other subcultures which were often populated with a number of Otherkin, such as neopaganism and goths, grew quickly thanks to the quick and global communication the internet offered. In short, without the internet the Otherkin community would probably be a much more

²⁶ Silver Elves, 2001, p. 192-193

²⁷ Korra'ti, 2006

²⁸ Kaijima, personal communication, 2006

²⁹ Malcolm-Rannir, personal communication, August 13, 2006

regional, sparse phenomenon, and both other 'kin and information about us would be tougher to track down.

These days there are hundreds of online resources dedicated to Otherkin. Some, such as <http://www.kinhost.org>, <http://www.otherkinalliance.org>, and <http://www.otherkin.net> include information on Otherkin in general. <http://www.therianthropy.org> and <http://www.sanguinarius.org> and similar sites cater primarily to specific groups of 'kin. The same goes for listserves, forums, communities, and groups on the internet; whether you're looking for generalized conversation, or trying to find 'kin of a specific type, chances are there's a place to communicate to your satisfaction. And, as I mentioned in the introduction, as of this writing there are a few books on the topic of varying qualities and depths.

There's even a web comic especially devoted to the trials, errors, and experiences of being Otherkin. *Theri There*, by Orion Sandstorm, is an amusing and often enlightening look at Otherkin culture. As of this writing it's located at <http://therithere.comicgenesis.com/>. Otherkin also have at least one magazine devoted to them. *Kinships*, published by Angelic Press, ran from 1999 to 2002 as a print magazine by and for Otherkin. It started again in 2004, as an Otherkin-friendly publication that prints both fiction and nonfiction.³⁰ In addition, there are a number of ezines out there of varying lifespans and content, ranging from collections of Otherkin-written fiction to nonfiction articles and essays. Otherkin-friendly music has been created and released on CD by both Elvendrums and Hetoreyn.³¹

As with other subcultures, the increase in networking online led to more in-person meetings and gatherings specifically designed for Otherkin. Some of these are limited to single cities and often occur on a monthly basis. Larger regional gathers tend to be yearly but offer a wider group of Otherkin to meet and greet; appendix A details some of these events. There are also a plethora of Otherkin-oriented organizations; most of these are vampire Houses, some of which may also include other Otherkin in their membership. And, appropriately enough, some therianthropes participate in "Howls", which originated from the alt.horror.werewolves newsgroup. The first was the Harvest Howl in Ohio in 1994, organized by Smash Greywolf.³² Howls are not always strictly populated by therians; werewolf enthusiasts of varying stripes may attend as well.

There are way too many gatherings on all levels to list in this book; however, if you check out some of the local resources such as listserves or message boards you ought to be able to get information

³⁰ Goldman, Rosenman, & Spence, unknown

³¹ See <http://www.elvendrums.com> and <http://www.elvenmusic.com>

³² Windrunner, unknown

about groups in your area. Also, this is far from being an exhaustive history; many people and groups have contributed to the growth of the community over the years in numerous ways, and their omission here is primarily a matter of space limitations. If you'd like to read more, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Vashti/Otherkin> has some additional details about the Otherkin community in general. Also, the *Psychic Vampire Codex* and http://www.sanguinarius.org/links/Community_History_and_Information/ both feature some highlights in the history of the vampire community in specific.

Symbols

Probably the most recognizable symbol in the Otherkin community is the seven-pointed star, or septagram. The obtuse septagram stems from the Enochian magic of John Dee and Edward Kelly, two 16th-century occultists. It is a part of the Sigillum Dei Aemeth, a symbol of a set of magical correspondences. The septagram itself symbolizes two sets of names of God, two sets of seven angels, and the seven planets of the ancients.³³ Otherkin, on the other hand, have reinterpreted the star for themselves. Most use the acute septagram as shown above, with or without the circle.

In the summer 1986 issue of Circle Network News, published by Circle Sanctuary, the Silver Elves published an article entitled "Elven Group Dynamics and Bonding Ritual". One of the features of the article



was the explanation of how they used the septagram as an illustration of a particular meditation. "Meditations on the Seven-Pointed Star", written specifically by Silver Flame, attributes a specific focus for each point of the star, almost like an elven rosary of sort. The points represent, respectively,

the Sun, the Trees, Creative Energy, a magical Gift, a prosperous and peaceful lifestyle that leads to Elfland, wind spirits, and "Extending Your Love and Magic To All Life...To the Mother Earth".³⁴ The septagram depicted along with the article is obtuse, rather than the acute septagram, but the symbolism is the same.

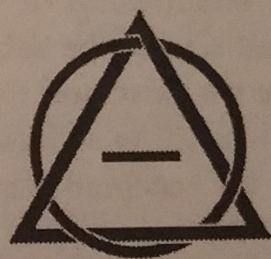
While there's no central symbol or other uniting factor binding all Otherkin together, the septagram has become a popular symbol among many 'kin. Initially it was primarily adopted by elves and fey; the Silver Elves believe it

³³ Whitcomb, 2002, p. 207

³⁴ Flame and Silverstar, 1986, p. 12

...is a particularly Elven symbol. Many of our kin utilize this symbol as an expression and reminder of the multifold nature of our ever evolving Dharma. We have been told that the seven pointed star...is composed of irrational angles, which mathematically subdivide into infinity. Thus representing both vast potential and a bridge to the worlds beyond ordinary realms of understanding. It is thus a symbol both mystical and magical...A Star with seven points each indicating a different direction is surely indicative of our precious FAERIE. And so very much like us. Yet they (the star points) are all united at their core...Just as we are...individuals...together.³⁵

However, there doesn't seem to be any universal interpretation of what the septagram stands for specifically; each person seems to have his own thoughts on it. One particular ritual from the House Kheperu site assigns an avatar representing a particular type of Otherkin to each point.³⁶ Christopher Angelo says that for him the seven points represent balance among the four traditional elements (earth, air, fire, water) as well as above, below, and within.³⁷ And Star Elf associates the seven points with the One source of creation, wisdom/knowledge, the spirit world, the Goddess, the God, the physical world, and magic.³⁸ One writer, magpie, draws on a number of associations with the number seven, such as the colors of the rainbow, days of the week, traditional astrological planets, and so forth. According to this essay, in addition to five physical elements or attributes (sun, wood/forest, sea, moon, and wind), there are also magic and connection (to one's Otherkin self).³⁹ Devan, of Elvendrums, lists a number of the above correspondences, as well as a few others including the seven notes of the musical scale and the seven wonders of the ancient world.⁴⁰



The Theta-Delta is uniquely associated with therianthropy. It consists of interlinking the Greek letters Theta and Delta. Theta is the first letter of "therios", one of the root words of "therianthrope", while Delta symbolizes change.⁴¹ It's not as well-known as the septagram, but still finds its way onto therian-specific websites such as <http://www.werelist.com>.⁴²

³⁵ Silver Elves, 2001, p. 102

³⁶ Belanger, 2004 (website)

³⁷ Angelo, unknown

³⁸ Star Elf, 2001

³⁹ magpie, unknown

⁴⁰ Devan, unknown

⁴¹ Coyote, 2005

⁴² Thanks to Nargus for the septagram and theta-delta illustrations for this section!

So Where Do Otherkin Stand Today?

With each year the community becomes a little more well-known to those outside of it. Otherkin have occasionally made an appearance in mainstream media. *The Village Voice* ran a rather positive article in 2001⁴³, following a 2000 article in *Fate* magazine⁴⁴, and articles in pagan and metaphysical publications show up now and then. One of the guests on the Sci-Fi Channel's "reality" show, "Mad, Mad House" in 2004, identified as a vampire. And doubtless we'll end up attracting more attention as time goes on. But how will the community as a whole react, not to mention as individuals?

The Otherkin community is still incredibly loosely-knit. Otherkin of all ages, backgrounds, and viewpoints are free to disseminate information across the Internet. While this has led to greater awareness of the subculture, as well as provided easier ways to organize, it's not all sunshine and roses. Cliquishness and backstabbing lead to smear campaigns, sometimes cleverly disguised as "supporting your friends". Egos run rampant, hit resistance, and are bruised (In other words, perfectly normal human behavior.).

Alongside the internal growth and resultant conflicts, there's also the relationship of Otherkin to non-'kin. Given the relative youth and small size of the subculture, it's not surprising that most people have no clue we exist, and that many non-'kin who do learn about us think we're all insane, or at least look at us askance. Yet already there are 'kin who cry for acceptance and tolerance by all, and while it's an admirable fight, it's way too soon to expect such a major change. After all, it's only been recently that pagans and magicians can talk openly about their rituals and spells without being branded schizophrenic or under the influence of hallucinogens by everyone else (though the accusation is still common). To expect everyone automatically to accept that some people believe they aren't human isn't realistic at this point, and probably won't be for quite some time.

Some Otherkin maintain that before we can progress either as individuals or as a community, we need to have concise answers to the questions of who and what we are. Given the amount of disparity among different peoples' experiences and opinions, there's not going to be an agreement any time soon. Among the 130 surveys I received for this first edition, there was a lot of variety in the answers people gave to every question. For instance, while 58 said that they believed that reincarnation was the cause of their being 'kin, 22 traced their origins to spirituality and/or magic, and 21 were unsure, while the rest either had

⁴³ See <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0107,mamatas,22273,8.html>

⁴⁴ See <http://www.eristic.net/fey/info/fatearticle.html>

other or multiple reasons. In addition, even among particular types of 'kin people rarely described even similar, let alone, identical interpretations of what their type of 'kin was. Dragons, as an example, ranged from "classic" European-style dragons, to mammal/reptile hybrids, to bipedal anthropomorphic scaled and winged beings, and even a few Eastern (Chinese, etc.) dragons, not all of whom stayed strictly within the familiar mythology associated with them. What I've compiled is simply my own research into different ideas people have, not the do-all and end-all of Otherkin existence, and doubtless there's much variety beyond this sampling.

There are many who maintain that if they can explain what Otherkin are, then they'll have a greater chance of becoming accepted as a distinct minority rather than a group of crazed roleplayers. Part of the reason that the second chapter of this book deals exclusively with theories as to how we got to be what we believe ourselves to be is because of people's tendency to require labeling and definition in order to grasp a concept. The more thoroughly we can explain why we believe what we believe, the better we'll be able to field questions and criticisms. This explains why there are ongoing debates about who "can or can't" be Otherkin. Some people feel that the definition and concept of Otherkin needs to be standardized to some extent before acceptance can begin, and if we let just anyone in then what's the point of giving ourselves labels anyway?.

On the other hand, there's a vocal opposition to mainstreaming. Otherkin have, to an extent, become a fad. Like it or not, there are certainly those who simply latch onto an idea that appeals to them, but doesn't fit them whatsoever. Rather than participating in the deep soul-searching that more serious seekers use, they instead try to find any excuse to prove their 'kin side. It's very common, for instance, for people just introduced to the idea of therianthropy to defend their assertions that they are therians themselves by claiming to lust for blood or try (usually unsuccessfully) to convince people that they can actually physically shapeshift. This is a direct result of the increasing popularity of Otherkin; as with anything else mainstream culture gets a hold of, the concept becomes watered-down and simplified until it becomes one-size-fits-all.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each side of the debate, but there's no one right way to go about discussing and organizing Otherkin. Some people have no need to be public about being 'kin, while other folk feel that familiarity breeds tolerance and, later, acceptance. Regardless, attempts to gather all Otherkin under one roof is bound to end in failure, as no one is going to get all 'kin to agree to the same terms. In my own experience, the majority of Otherkin I've come into contact with tend to prefer to be independent operators, each

deciding for himself how open to be and what being 'kin means to him. However, they, and most Otherkin, insist vehemently that there must be reflection and questioning of the self as to avoid self-delusion, and to not accept anything that even remotely resembles "proof" without thorough examination. Needless to say, one of the many reasons I wrote this book was to give Otherkin one more resource in defining both themselves and the community as a whole, and to germinate thought about things people may not always give consideration to. I received a number of surveys from people who thanked me for letting them answer my questions. Most of them had never really sat down and written out their thoughts on being Otherkin before, and found it to be a beneficial exercise that allowed them to understand being Otherkin much better. I hope that you, too, now have more of a grasp on Otherkin than you did at the start of this chapter, and that you'll benefit from the pages to come.

Chapter 2: Theories of Otherkin Origins

A large portion of the Awakening process for many Otherkin is figuring out “Where did this part of me come from?” For some, it may help them feel more validated in a society in which they’re often accused of being delusional. Others find that it explains certain traits they have that they feel identify them as Otherkin. It’s a drive similar to that of tracing your family tree—there’s a certain satisfaction in knowing your roots.

There’s no single explanation for how someone becomes Otherkin. Many just feel “different” from an early age, and refine this identification over time and experience, seeking possible answers to why they have this identity in the first place. Origins vary from person to person, and even two people who both trace their being ‘kin to reincarnation may have widely different viewpoints on the particulars. While some of the theories stretch reality a bit much for the mundane population, others such as reincarnation are slowly gaining mainstream acceptance.

Otherkin vary in how they view the nature of being Other. For some it’s a literal difference that may be explained through reincarnation or genetics. Other people explain it more metaphorically; they may see it as a matter of personal mythology, or something that explains a quirky psychological imprint but shouldn’t be taken as an actual event or physical trait. And some even see it both ways at once, perhaps seeing past/alternate lives both as literal events and as part of the stories they tell about themselves to understand themselves a little better.

Reincarnation

By far the most commonly referenced explanation for being Otherkin is having been something nonhuman in a past/alternate life. Some may have existed on the Earth we are familiar with, though at a different time, or in an alternate, parallel Earth-reality, or a different planet or dimension entirely. Sometimes this varies according to the type of ‘kin. Therianthropes who believe in reincarnation almost always derive from this plane of existence, as their animal selves/souls are native to it. Elves, faeries, magical creatures and others of that ilk usually have backgrounds decidedly not of this world, though there are exceptions.

The definition of reincarnation that Otherkin have is more along the lines of what neopagans and New Agers tend to subscribe to, rather than the more traditional definition of various Asian religions.

Gesigewigu's, a Rakshasa (entity in Hindu mythos often called a demon), said:

I'm hearing the voice of a Buddhist nun I've trained with, she would go on and on, about the difference between Reincarnation, and Rebirth, and that people should learn the difference, cause they use the terms wrong. Rebirth is what we generally call Reincarnation, but Reincarnation is what earthly Dakinis, earthly bodhisattvas, tulkus, etc. do. Reincarnation is supposed to be being born with knowledge of the self and memory of the past forms, usually very complete. But that is the nitpick of the language.⁴⁵

Otherkin cite a number of reasons as to why they may have been born into a human body.

Because I Needed to Learn Something About Being Human

Many reincarnationists believe that we enter into the lives that we do in order to learn a specific lesson. There are lessons that only the unique experience of being human can teach. Perhaps some 'kin are here to better understand humanity so that they can therefore adopt certain human behaviors. Maybe Earth today has a balance of creation and destruction, Nature and technology that is unique in the Multiverse. Perhaps some of us came here from someplace better as punishment/rehabilitation for some wrongdoing; or maybe from somewhere worse so we can get a breather (after all, this place certainly isn't all bad!). Just as a soul may be born as a cougar to learn to be more independent, for example, the experience of being human might be how some souls learn what to do—or not do—with modern technology, or our particular blend of sex and love, or whatever else it is that makes us human.

Because This World Needs My Help

To some Otherkin, this place is in trouble. The environment is constantly under siege, millions of humans live in poverty-stricken, war-torn areas, disease is rampant and some days it just seems like the whole biosystem is about to collapse under the pressure. There are Otherkin who feel they came here with the purpose of alleviating some of the pain. There's the theory that other sentient places in the Multiverse are well aware of us and want to try to help us, if for no other reason than to keep us from destroying everything around us. So souls come from

⁴⁵ Gesigewigu's, personal communication, August 9, 2006

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these places in order to help out what is seen as a state of emergency. Take the concept of thinking globally, and expand it across the Multiverse. Predictably many of the Otherkin under this heading dedicate themselves to social, political, spiritual, and related causes meant to make a positive impact.

Oops

Species dysphoria does occasionally occur among Otherkin. This means that there are those who fully believe they were born into the completely wrong body. Stories vary as to why the soul ended up in the wrong body, ranging from "Well, I thought I was headed into a fox kit, but I guess I missed" to "I'm here against my will because of something I did in another life" (see the first theory listed above).

I Dunno, You Tell Me

There are plenty of Otherkin who have absolutely no idea how they got here. While some do search for answers, many just shrug, chalk it up to unknown forces, and go on with their lives.

The life in question doesn't necessarily have to be past, either, if one views time in a nonlinear sense. It's quite possible that 'kin may be viewing a life that is to come, from the perspective of the life they are living now. Similarly, sade wolfkitten, who best describes herself as a woodnymph, has an interesting theory, particularly in light of the idea of nonlinear time: "I'm also quite partial to the idea that Otherkin-ness is often not a reflection of a past life so much as it is programming for a FUTURE one. I think a lot of the people you meet online who identify as 'kin are moving towards becoming something other than 20th century human (which anyone old enough to go online is, even though it's now the 21st)." Perhaps "past" life memories are actually glimpses of things to come, from a linear standpoint.

The possibility that a person may have experienced a wide variety of lives increases if you take into account the motif of the Universe going through its own life-death-rebirth cycles, manifesting differently each time. Good examples are the Four Worlds of the Hopi⁴⁶ or the Yugas of the Hindu worldview⁴⁷. It's possible that the "made-up" beings that some 'kin identify as stem from cycles prior to (or after) the current one, depending on whether you apply these to linear time or not.

⁴⁶ Welker, 1998

⁴⁷ Morales, 1997

Memories of these worlds and the lives that were lived in them are central to the reincarnation theory, as they provide the closest thing to proof (if personal experience even needs to be "proven"). Some 'kin have extensive memories of their other lives, though they may be colored by the current experience of being human, as in the case of Rhianna, who is Tuatha de Danaan:

I remember enough to probably write an Umberto Eco sized novel on the subject. I'm not sure where to start there. The memories are kind of unusual and often displaced, but then they're also through a filter, like all memories are through a filter as I'm sure you know. I remember the world that is the seat of my House and the two moons that lit the skies above the ocean near my home. This would be my strongest and greatest memory of home.

Otherkin may have memories of only one life as a certain type of being, or they may have several. Skatche has enough memories from a number of lives as an elf to recreate a partial history of that particular group as they shifted from forest dwellers to builders of cities. Kistaro had concurrent lives which were focused on maintaining hir personality from life to life:

I managed to get an incarnation in which I wound up as a professor at the local equivalent of a university - studying magic itself, trying to figure out how it worked and how to use it most effectively. I was fulfilled. This was fascinating. I wanted to do this forever, but like all mortals, I was doomed to die - and the amnesia of reincarnation would claim all my work for myself, leaving it to others to complete and I'd have to get as fantastically lucky again to pick it back up. But by then, I'd developed a working theory of the effects of belief on magic and entities - I'd already concluded that deities are created by belief, and I decided to try an experiment on myself, with nothing to lose because without doing something I'd have nothing. Would it be possible to make myself a legend in that world's history, not worshipped but believed to be such a way, and use the energy of that belief to keep myself as I wanted to be, eternally the Professor?

Well, the short form is "yes", but only strongly enough that I could remember what I was doing in my next incarnation and return to my work, and keep the gambit going, making myself more securely what I wanted to be each time. And now, several thousand years later, I've done it. I don't really have free will anymore, because I'm constrained by this web of belief that protects me and makes me exactly what I want to be - including cheating more than a little by convincing people of things I wished were true about me and making it so in a roundabout way...

So in a way, my "Otherkin-ness" is a reflection of an aspect of myself - but it is myself as I worked hard for many incarnations to define myself to be! (emphasis hers)

Some of the memories of Otherkin appear to be exclusively of flashy, exciting lives, though this is common with past life regression in general. One possible explanation is the need to stand out, sort of the more fantastic version of being Cleopatra or Aleister Crowley reincarnated. A kinder and more sufficient answer to this problem may be that more intense lives imprint themselves more strongly on the soul's memory, in the same way that we rarely remember everyday occurrences, but almost never forget more important events.

Many 'kin, such as CUSM, who has angelic, elven, and draconic heritage, tend to express a tendency towards sparse memories: "I have only dreams and scattered visions to make sense of it. I remember thinking to myself as a toddler in bed to the extent of 'Well, here I am again' and I think I was in conversation with someone at the time about it. Last moments before previous memories were locked away." The great amount of detail others report about their other lives may lead the skeptic to believe that they're just making it up. It's always possible, though, that these 'kin simply have a very good memory and managed to keep their egos relatively intact from life to life.

The methods by which Otherkin access their memories and check their veracity vary. Divination and guided meditations/past-life regressions are both common methods of verifying one's suspicions. In interviewing Teriel, who identifies different aspects of himself as angelic, draconic, elven, and therian, I aided him in accessing as much of each 'kin side as possible through a guided meditation in person. As someone experienced with meditation in general, he was able to bring himself to the necessary relaxed state; I then symbolically opened him up and drew out each aspect of him that I wanted to talk with directly, and then recorded the conversation. Dreams can also provide information. It's not uncommon for the subconscious to release memories of other lives during dreams. These should be backed up with other forms of verification, as dreams may also be purely symbolic, or the subconscious may simply be processing the events of the day through creative means.

The key to verification is consistency. A memory or theme that repeatedly comes up is more likely to be "true" than one that makes only a single, fleeting appearance. In addition, repeated experiments can clarify a memory; for instance, a vague memory of a forest can mean just about anything. But deeper seeking can tell where the forest is, who lives there, and what the seeker's place there was. As Áine observes, "Memories are fairly consistent, though sometimes puzzling at the time,

only to make sense later on when other pieces of the puzzle are revealed."

There are cases of two or more Otherkin sharing memories with each other, even without communicating about it previously. Arhuaine reportes a very vivid example of this:

The main thing that clinched it for me happened about 6 years ago. I was fairly new to the internet community and had put up a simple website that included a few of my memories. One of those memories involved a memory from my childhood in Alorya, where I'd encountered a "skyhorse" (the term is misleading, these creatures aren't exactly pegasus-like, but more like four-legged, winged birds, though they are large enough to ride). What I had deliberately omitted from the website was that when I saw this creature it had actually come up to me and spoke to me. Not long after, I was contacted by someone who had read my website and believed that not only was he from Alorya, he believed that he was my father. I was sceptical [sic] about that, until one day I was chatting to him on AIM and he mentioned that memory, and he said, didn't that skyhorse come and speak to you? And he then proceeded to tell me exactly what that skyhorse had said to me, almost word-for-word. I was stunned, but since then I've not doubted for a moment. I can't possibly doubt, after that.

One very unique case of shared memory deals particularly with a group of elves known as the Elenari. Of all Otherkin, the Elenari have probably done some of the most extensive work as far as piecing together their past lives as a culture, though they're not the only ones. They have compared memories with each other and come to agreement on a number of points, including characteristics of different groups of elves, details about their home, and various pieces of cultural heritage.⁴⁸ According to what the Elenari remember, the reason they incarnated here is to escape "Corruption [which] has been described as a destroying force from outside the reality of the Elenari. In this case, outside of reality refers along the lines of a hostile plane of existence rather than a parallel universe".⁴⁹

Reincarnation theory requires a belief in a soul, or some other aspect of the personality that continues on after the body dies. Some people don't attribute their being 'kin so much to an entire soul reincarnating as a set of soul-fragments collectively working together as a personality. So, for instance, in the case of someone who is more than one type of 'kin, one fragment may have been part of an elf in another life, while another was part of a tiger. The fragments may collect around a central primary energy to create a complete soul, or the soul may be entirely comprised of fragments. When the person dies, the soul

⁴⁸ K'Llayna, et. al., 2000

⁴⁹ Anonymous, 2006-D

becomes fragmented again and each piece goes on its separate journey. Karl concurs: "Personally I think our soul stuff gets recycled such that some of those ancient souls are divided into many different individuals in each generation. Otherkin soul stuff can come from actual entities but also from stories that have enough belief in them to make them come alive".

Reincarnation in general is often questioned by skeptics. One point that is sometimes brought up is, if we truly are reincarnated from other lives, whether Earthly or otherwise, how come we don't speak the languages we spoke before, especially if they're languages that are still spoken widely today?

The answer lies primarily in the limited ability of the brain to store information. Much of what constitutes the ability to process language involves neural pathways that are formed in the brain as we learn languages; this is why we learn easier when we are younger and our brains are more malleable, and it also explains why brain injuries can affect lingual skills apart from the actual motor skills necessary to speak. Because of this limited capacity we have to retain that which is useful to us, with the exception of random blips of memory that may end up being useless accidents. Therefore, much of what is needed for language may very well be lost with the death of the brain. Nama adds in this on the point of practicality:

Language isn't as important as people make it sound, save to communicate that which is translatable between minds via agreed-upon grunts, squeels, chatterings, and gestures. So the language you learn when you come back over is likely the most important language you will need in that environment, at least to begin with. I think an interesting question to pose is if in your last life here you spoke Japanese, and in your current life you were also born into speaking Japanese, were you better at it than last time? Of course then you have to take into account (albeit on a more lengthy scale) the matter of nature versus nurture, but it would make for an interesting study.

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In addition, this idea can be seen in the early years of our development in this life. Meirya points out, "Hell, forget just Otherkin - how many everyday people do you know that possess complete memories of the past however-many years of their *current* life? Memory is a tricky thing, and fuzzy; I couldn't give you the details of something that happened three days ago, much less ten years ago; how should anyone be expected to have perfect recall of *past* lives if they don't have perfect recall of *this* one? (emphasis hers)".⁵¹ Ravenari adds:

⁵⁰ Karl, personal communication, August 9, 2006

⁵¹ Nama, personal communication, August 9, 2006

If we don't have the benefits of others telling us it was real, then we have to go by our own faith and conviction. This isn't enough for other people - but does it matter? I 'know' in my heart I was a baby once, I am lucky I have proof because I don't remember much about it! I 'know' in my heart that I was a shamaness once in another lifetime, I have no proof, I don't remember much about it, but that's okay, I don't need external validation to support my faith. That's the whole point with faith, and that to me is the spiritual component of otherkin - whether you're an atheist or not.⁵²

However, having spoken a language in a previous life may sometimes aid in picking it up in this one, as Duo explains: "For someone not born in that race or culture, speaking and/or understanding a secondary language they were not exposed to at birth would prove rather difficult. However, from our experience, people who used to speak that language in a past life can become strongly attracted to it in their present existence, and pick it up with greater proficiency".⁵³

As for languages themselves, there are a few Otherkin who keep track of what they recall of their former forms of communication. Gesigewigu's reports that "some Otherkin do experience glossolalia/xenoglossia, myself included, I have a collection of words and names that have surfaced in memories, and you can trace the words back to the appropriate language for the memory (most often Sanskrit and Khmer)". Several dialects of elven languages (not to be mistaken for Tolkien's elvish) have been partially recovered. Two websites include words and phrases from various elven dialects.⁵⁴

Another possibility is that what 'kin are experiencing as their own lives and experiences are actually archetypes and motifs plucked from the Collective Unconscious and given unique form by the personal subconscious. There's no guarantee, after all, that when a person does a past life regression that what s/he sees is actually hir own life. It could just as likely be that s/he's picking up on a set of memories or thoughts from someone else.

Not all Otherkin put quite so much faith in past life memories. It's easy to subconsciously fabricate stories through wishful thinking, and to take any snippet of evidence as sure proof of a memory. Even those who do work with memories do understand that they're not always complete or unsullied by perception. Sarah, a faerie, says that although she's reincarnated, she takes memories of that life with a grain of salt: "I believe it has been colored by my imagination and the fact that

⁵² Ravenari, personal communication, August 9, 2006
⁵³ Duo, 2006-A

⁵⁴ These may be found at <http://greenworld.spiritualitea.net/elenaridict.html> and <http://www.rialian.com/gateways/elven-language.htm>

my brain is human and can only process things in certain ways." It is entirely possible that for some 'kin unadulterated memories may be next to impossible simply due to a lack of translation between the 'kin life and the human understanding thereof. After all, the difference between a human's worldview and a bear's worldview is vast, even though both are Earth-based mammals. One can only imagine the difficulty in conveying information between two species from different realities!

Kaijima brings up an alternate idea on the veracity of past life recall: "My experience with past-life recall has, to date, suggested that the 'memories' people appear to recall are largely reconstructions of emotional impressions carried over from a previous existence or alternate existence. They use their present knowledge and context to shape these images and give them detail." He is not saying that they're fake or bad, but rather a combination of remnants of previous lives, and what is known as personal mythology (discussed later on in this chapter).

Some 'kin can get so entirely wrapped up in their past lives that they begin to lose touch with this one. Rialian, an elf, advises against accepting any memories as gospel truth, and he's not the only person to do so. He makes the following observation:

I am VERY cautious in dealing with such things, as I have seen enough of the Otherkin community go a bit more than slightly insane in being "eaten" by their "memories"...and seeing them re-write those memories to the point that they are willing to be very, very stupid....I do not trust past-life memories, even if they were from THIS physical world....The brains we have now are running with different programing and some differences in hardware...adding in the otherworld and all that, it gets more and more interesting. I am impressed that there is effective enough signal that it translates over enough that some of us recognize each other and can recompile enough that it is apparent that there is something there in common.

On the other hand, there's something to be said for accepting memories, whether they're literal or not. As with the question of fitting into modern definitions of sanity, much depends on how memories affect and benefit the individual. Says Mora:

I cannot really prove that the memories are not just products of my subconscious but, as I see it, if the collective unconscious or my own subconscious chooses to present this to me, there is obviously merit to it, regardless of the memories being real to others or only to me. It is the same argument as "Are the Gods real or imagined". In the end, does it really matter? My personal theory is that if it helps you advance as a being... more power to ya!

No matter whether these lives are seen as past, future, or simply in an alternate space/time conjunction, they can only be proven so far as

reincarnation in general can be proven. As with so many other topics surrounding Otherkin, reincarnation is best left to the individual, with one part research, one part questioning, and one part faith. The Silver Elves said it quite nicely in their survey:

We were much like we are now, except we've learned a lot in the intervening lifetimes. We remember this in our souls, which means we don't dwell on details of that life, although we could if we chose to do so, but rather remember it in our feelings. We have for lifetime upon lifetime, set our lives upon the present and the future and we seldom look back, although we often long for that world that once was. The memories/feelings are utterly consistent and, of course, they are products of our subconscious/unconscious, for that is where our personal and collective unconscious abides. All the memories of our past lives are stored there. Why do some folks imagine one thing, and others something else? Because of who they are, who they have been, and who they are destined to be. We reveal our true selves even in, perhaps particularly in, our fantasies and imagination.

Physical Explanations

While certain medical conditions have been historically associated with nonhuman beings, they can't be used to explain Otherkin. Still, they're worth a mention here. Porphyria is a physical medical condition sometimes pointed to as an explanation for werewolves and vampires. It is a genetic skin condition caused by enzyme deficiencies that causes outbreaks of rashes on the skin as well as a breakdown of the integrity of the epidermis. These dermal symptoms are caused by a reaction by the body to sunlight. In addition, porphyria may cause excess hair growth, and retraction of lips and gums which make the teeth appear larger. Photosensitivity adds even more to the vampiric hype surrounding this disease.⁵⁵

Congenital hypertrichosis lanuginosa is postulated as a possible source for werewolf legends. This is another rare genetic disorder which causes excessive growth of hair all over the body, which includes the face. Side-show "freaks" with extreme cases of hair growth over the entire body were billed as "dog-boys" or other degrading terms.⁵⁶ Still, both porphyria and hypertrichosis are exceedingly rare, and additionally it's pretty obvious that they're no more common among Otherkin than anyone else.

Vampirism is unique in the field of Otherkin as it possesses a distinctly physical trait, that of dependence on energy or blood to maintain the body's health. While medical explanations should not be

⁵⁵ St. Philip, 1996

⁵⁶ Van Voorhees MD, 2005

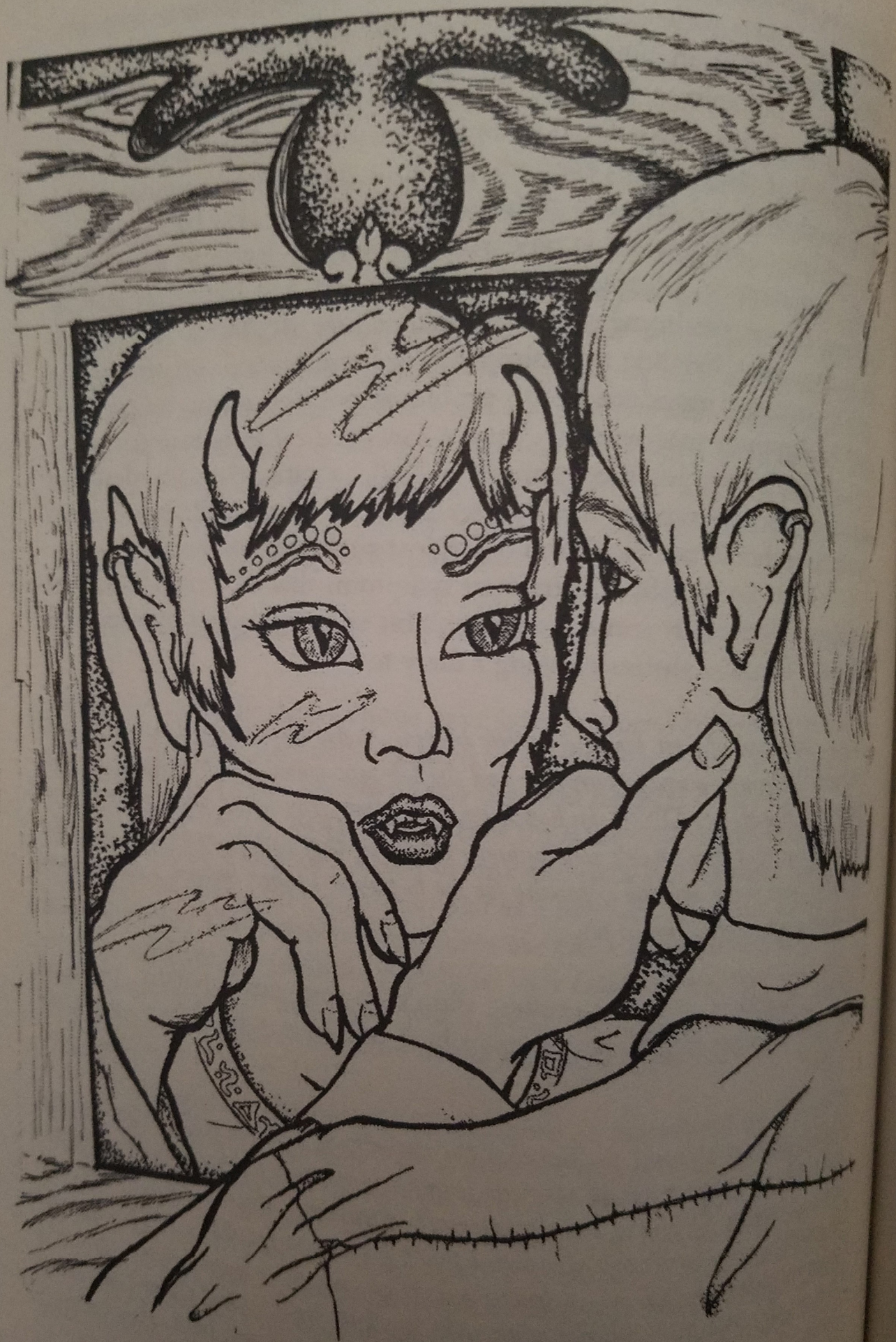
the sole evidence used to try to explain this dependence, they are certainly a factor to keep in mind. Iron deficiency can result in pica, a medical condition in which a person craves strange, often inedible, substances. Sometimes, in the case of iron deficiency, the focus of the cravings is often a substance high in iron or that helps retain iron in the system.⁵⁷ It is not unlikely, then, that at least some blood cravings could be caused by low-level iron deficiency. Poor diets and bad health in general can contribute to fatigue and low energy levels in general, as well. Autoimmune diseases such as HIV/AIDS and Lupus, as well as chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia, are all illnesses that sap a person's energy. Feeding may simply be a more esoteric way of coping with these rather mundane health problems, and those who believe they may be vampires may want to have a few medical tests run just to be sure it's not something more mundane. Still, as with other disorders I've discussed, most vampires don't suffer from any of these illnesses and so vampirism should not be passed off as just a medical condition.

There are no physical traits or symptoms that all Otherkin have in common. Very rarely someone will exhibit an unexplained physiological anomaly. Bandora attributes being a faery to:

...a combination of past life and genetic hybrid. A few months ago I had a DNA test done for genetic ancestry purposes and the lab commented how they found it weird that even though my DNA looked human in part, they found weird strands and amino acids that they hadn't seen before. Analyzing that was beyond the scope of the test they were doing and too expensive for me to pursue further, besides, I didn't want to become somebody's guinea pig.

While Brendan, who is sidhe, didn't report any specific physical anomalies in his family, he reports a high occurrence of Otherkin related to him:

My family doesn't discuss the fact that the majority of us seem to be Otherkin. On dad's side, it's pretty much all sanguine [vampire], on mom's side the sidhe and other associated things. Of course, nobody outwardly discusses it, since that would be crazy or something. My family sort of assumed that I'd turn out just like dad's family, and arranged such things for me as driving lessons at and after sunset when I became a teenager. Imagine their surprise when, like my half brother and the rest of mom's family, I turned up with the skin allergy to iron and my Irish grandmother's temperament. (Emphasis his)



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Thorinn, a bear therianthrope, also says that his therianthropy is genetic. Interestingly, he links it to the berserkers of Germanic lore; he himself is primarily of Germanic stock. And Kaldera supports the theory that vampirism may be inherited.⁵⁸

The family resemblance may sometimes only extend to one or two other relatives. The father of Solo and Duo is a possible example, as Solo explains:

Our biological father, when he was young, would tell people that he wanted to be a fox when he grew up. He also has eyes that, under average circumstances are green, but've been known to randomly turn very yellow, and he has rather pronounced canines. He also has an amazing, almost hypnotic effect on dogs, and he considers them his favorite animals and feels he can strongly relate to them...Coincidence? It does make one think, seeing as he ended up siring a vulpine/canine multiple.

Solo's father possesses physical characteristics which mimic what may be an Other side. This is another common argument towards genetic Otherness, if not always inherited.

The idea of genetic Otherkin harks back to idea that somewhere way back when, someone's many-times-great grandparent slept with something that wasn't human. Numerous stories exist in indigenous mythologies of families that intermarried with or even sprang from various species of animal. For instance, an Inuit story describes how Wolverine and Muskrat mated five times and created the various races of human.⁵⁹ Various retellings of how the grizzly bear came about due to a union between humans and bears spring from North America and Siberia.⁶⁰ European folk tales tell of relationships between humans and fey folk. The most common story pattern involves a man finding the skin of a selkie, swan-woman or other female shapeshifter and by possessing it he also possesses her. While they do beget children eventually she finds her skin and escapes back to the sea.⁶¹ These stories are used as evidence that such a thing may be possible.

In other cases, humans and animals are said to interbreed. A myth of the Chipewyan people states that "At one time the People spoke the same language as the animals. They often intermarried, and the separation between people and other creatures became less and less distinct."⁶²

⁵⁸ Kaldera, 2005, p. 13

⁵⁹ Pijoan, 1992, p. 121-2

⁶⁰ Rockwell, 1991, p. 121

⁶¹ Jamal, 1995, p. 60-62 and Yolen, 1986, p. 303-304

⁶² McNamee and Wolfe, 1995, p. 120

This brings up the immediate question of whether humans and other animals cannot interbreed in a literal sense, regardless of certain creation stories. In addition, nobody's come up with proof for the physical existence (on this plane, anyway) of dragons, elves, and other "fantastic" beings, let alone whether they can produce young with humans. Still, there is the occasional person who believes that being 'kin' is an inherited trait. Calaelan, a succubus, is one example: "I believe that at some point one of my ancestors coupled with a Succubus or Incubus, and that I am a 'throw back' to that union. A lot of our ancestry is clouded so I am unsure when this may have occurred, and whether it was from the paternal or maternal ancestry". And Rannirl Windtree goes into great detail about having a crossbred genetic background in "Here and Now".⁶³

Another theory is that beings will consistently incarnate in the human bloodline most closely associated with their mythology, which is a nongenetic inheritance. For instance, a number of fey folk emphasize their Celtic heritage. Karl has this to say:

I think our souls are made up of parts of souls from generations before us - I can remember bits and pieces of some past lives that relate to me. I don't know if the Otherkin aspects are just my way of understanding parts of my identity or if I have parts of Otherkin souls in mine. My Celtic roots come strongly through my Austrian heritage from the region that was once Noricum. I wonder if that might be why the Scots and Irish legends feel good to me but don't quite fit. Possibly there is a cultural thread that connects us to the entities and stories of the places our ancestors came from (emphasis mine).

What Karl says resembles a quote from the Silver Elves: "It's not so much that the blood of our ancestors flows in our veins, as the fact that we were our ancestors."⁶⁴ However, this should not be taken as a hard and fast rule to be used to judge whether someone is Otherkin or not. There are plenty of people whose 'kin side and genetic heritage have little to nothing to do with each other. The case may be not so much in the genes, as that different nonhuman spirits prefer certain human bloodlines to incarnate into.

Regardless of origin, for some Otherkin having physical traits that resemble the 'kin self helps support their assertions that they are indeed 'kin. Teriel attributes his rather feminine features to his angelic heritage. Many of the elves I've met in person, for example, have been Tolkienesque in appearance (if not resonance) and tended towards tall, willowy bodies and prefer long, flowing hair. Illanou says that "My

⁶³ Windtree, Rannirl (unknown)
⁶⁴ Silver Elves, 2001, p. 27

present body does not reflect any of the outward physical traits of my wolf-self, other than my tall and lanky build. I do, however, possess a keener sense of smell and hearing than most people as well as high physical endurance." A therianthrope may point out his more animal characteristics such as elongated canines or a body style resembling that of their animal side. TygerMoon Foxx says of her mate, Simtra: "His canines are elongated. His feet are oddly constructed and he's actually built more for walking digitigrade than plantigrade; it hurts him to walk flat footed...His ears are oddly shaped and oddly placed in the head. They come to a sort of point and are covered with a soft red down."

Anton, a feline therian, shows a number of physiological parallels between his physical human body, and felines. Anton mentions the fact that felines can't taste sweetness in conjunction with his apparent deficiency in that particular range of taste. He also mentions excellent night vision, and notes that friends have remarked on how his movements resemble those of a cat—as well as his ability to sleep comfortably in seemingly uncomfortable places (think of a mountain lion snoozing on a branch). Like Simtra (and me) he tends to walk on the balls of his feet. And he has an automatic tendency towards behaviors that are quite feline, such as kneading, or greeting someone by touching his nose to theirs.

There are, however, 'kin who may seem at first to be the exact opposite of their 'kin sides, physically speaking—corpulent elves, or thin, weedy bear therians. There's more to it than simply flesh; often it's in the way a person carries himself, how s/he moves. Posture, mannerisms, and personality go a long way in others' perception of the body. Health, too, affects the way the body looks, and not just physical health. A person who is underconfident and wary appears much different from someone who is assertive and unafraid. So a strong connection to your 'kin side may affect your body in the same way as your self-confidence.

Other physiological traits beyond appearance may also be cited by some as evidence of being 'kin. Sanguine vampires report a physical need for blood, for example. If they don't feed every so often they begin to exhibit fatigue and other symptoms of ill health. Even those who tend to take a skeptic's eye to the idea of Otherkin-specific physical traits may acknowledge the similarity of particular needs of their own to those of their 'kin side. Doc Holliday, who identifies as an Ethiopian wolf, is a good example of this balanced approach:

I have yet to see how the non-human aspects of my being affect my life in any tangible manner. Most of my social quirks can be easily written off as a product of the normal human experience....There are only two things which I can readily attribute 100% to the presence of a non-human psyche within my self: one is an actual predilection for

blood and the other is the occasional thought that carrion might not be so bad after all. In the first case, most predators who are native to regions that are either in or border on the desert are known to metabolize water from blood. In the second case, it's not uncommon for some canine species to eat carrion - and if I am hungry, it's not odd for me to consider carrion the way I'd consider ordering a hamburger.

Additionally, while the idea of being able to trace specific genetic quirks in Otherkin is intriguing, it's already apparent that due to costs, even assuming cooperation on the part of 'kin and researchers alike, this research is well nigh impossible. Nobody's going to be able to get a grant to find out if a group of dragonkin share the same abnormal chromosome. Now, I'd love to see it if this could actually be put to the test, because then there'd be something that would be at least somewhat concrete proof of the Otherkin phenomenon to show the world at large. Unless we find a 'kin-friendly geneticist with a large amount of spare time and cash, though, the genetic theory is going to have to remain untested.

A few Otherkin have expressed interest in trans-speciesism, cybernetics, and other experimental theories in extreme body modification. Others practice more currently viable methods, such as tattoos that resemble animal fur or wings, or fake fangs. Some use specific clothing and other costumery to help "fill in the blanks"; some therianthropes, for example, may wear a fake tail or ears, particularly if they are also part of the furry fandom.

In the end, being Otherkin isn't about the appearance of the physical body so much as the person it houses. Not having a body that resembles your 'kin self does not automatically disqualify you from the Great Otherkin Approval Contest (which, thankfully, only exists in my sense of humor). The body alone does not Otherkin make; what's important is who's wearing that body.

One of the Silver Elves' letters addresses this idea:

The elfin do not preceive [sic] our race in the same way others do. Most folks look at race as a combination of physical characteristics: skin color, shape of eyes, nose, mouth, etc. Some see race also as an extension of national culture: the german race, the french race, japanese, hebrew etc. These folks tend to picture us in the same fashion. To them the elves must have pointed ears or are very short or tall and skinny or have white or silver hair or three fingers, pale or green or blue skin, etc. However, none of these things apply to the way the elven define race. The elfin preceive [sic] race by spiritual characteristics. Physically we might be of any skin color and in fact you can find elves in every category of what what folks think of a race.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Silver Elves, 2001, p. 194

walking in

A walk-in is a soul that enters a body at some point after birth, usually at least a few years thereafter. Generally the original soul departs, though this is not always the case. There may be one or more walk-ins who share the same body; often, though not always, more than one soul will arrive at the same time.

The transfer often occurs when the body receives a major trauma that is potentially fatal. When the original soul leaves, the new soul(s) steps in and keeps the body from dying. The transition can also happen in a perfectly healthy body, though, a process that usually takes a period of time to complete. While most souls relinquish their bodies willingly, involuntary takeover of a body does happen on occasion.⁶⁶ Erelin, a phouka, presents a unique case: "I induced labor a month early to prevent the human from being present, and I took over the body as it was being born".⁶⁷ This is not universal, however. There are plenty of walk-ins who simply exchanged the body, often because the original soul no longer wanted that life.

Reasons for walking in vary. In some cases, the walk-in soul has no idea why s/he's there. Some, however, have a definite purpose, as in the case of the Shards:

For most of us, spiritual reasons are why we walked in. There are operations that cannot be accomplished as disembodied entities. Magick works differently when you are a spirit - spirits lack the diversity and strength of connections to parts of the universe that physically embodied beings possess. Because a spirit/controlling intelligence is necessary to animate a complex living being, having a living body can be said to make one a conduit between one plane of existence and another. Those of us who have mystical/esoteric interests take advantage of these opportunities and connections in different ways, from meditation and reiki to ceremonial and experimental magickal operations that are designed to force the evolution of the consciousness in question. Looking at a human life from the outside in, instead of the inside out, has given us a new perspective on existence, though there are some nuances of the human condition that just make no sense to us.

Tysha had a different reason for walking in:

Once I was a dragon and I lived in a place known as Illsyndra... At the time the council on Illsyndra were working out a way of getting an Illsyndran to Earth, it was believed that our race originated there and they wanted to know what it was like now. They offered me the chance to travel there.. The idea was my soul/self/essence would

⁶⁶ Anonymous, 2006-K

⁶⁷ Erelin, personal communication, August 13, 2006

be separated from my body and would travel to Earth to enter an empty human body. Idea being they would find someone ready to die and replace me with them. My body would remain on Illsyndra and would be kept alive ready for me to come back and return to it.

Ruth Montgomery, author of *Strangers Among Us*, the first book published about walk-ins, emphasizes that people walk in because of some higher cosmic purpose. According to her, all walk-ins throughout history played pivotal roles in human history, from hiding away the Dead Sea Scrolls for future archaeologists to find, to leading Central American indigenous people to safety during the Spanish invasions.⁶⁸ However, she says this about all walk-ins, whereas none of my walk-in survey respondents reported having any Universe-shaking agendas; Tysha's exploration of this world for her own culture seems to be about the extent of it. In fact, any such grandiose claims such as what Montgomery describes are generally looked askance by the Otherkin community in general.

The walk-in soul's initial time in the body may result in some awkwardness. Since s/he's picking up someone else's life, s/he may find that s/he's not content with the body's family, career, or lifestyle. S/he also has to try to access the memories of the original soul in order to fill in the blanks. This can particularly be problematic for nonhuman souls. Says Casteylan:

Awakening was very different for me. I already knew who and what I was when I came here. Awakening to the realisation that I was now sharing someone else's body, that was harder to cope with. It took me about 12 months after my arrival, to understand my situation, to be able to take front and communicate with people. You could say that I Awakened to being human.

For some walk-ins, there seems to be a definite moment when the original inhabitant of the body either abandons it or allows the walk-in soul(s) access. They remember entering the body, and often retain decent memories of the events leading up to that moment. Tysha is a good example:

So sometime around July 1991 I arrived on Earth. All I remember of the first few months was a feeling of confusion and a sensation I can only describe as waking up very, very slowly in a dark box. I felt formless, no sight, no touch, and for a long time no sound. Slowly, over time, I started feeling the body I was in and realised I wasn't alone in it. The original 'occupant', Tracey, was still here and was terrified, but to be

⁶⁸ Montgomery, 1979, p. 50-51

honest so was I. It led to even more confusion as we tried to communicate with each other and I'm still not sure how we managed it, but we did, and I was now a passenger in her body.

The Shards also exhibit independence from the person who was born into the body:

The majority of us have specific tasks that we wish to accomplish but were not able to do so lacking a physical body. A few of us were wandering spirits who saw a way to accomplish their goals, and walked into this body to "set up shop", as it were. We arrived as the original controlling intelligence of this body was giving up on life and walking out of this incarnation, effectively trading places. (Emphasis mine)

Teriel distinctly remembers the point at which he found his present body when it drowned at the age of seven. The original soul had already left but the body was not entirely dead, so he decided to take up residence. He describes it not much as a planned situation as it was being "in the right place at the right time". He only describes his time before as being "a possibility in a sea of possibilities".⁶⁹

In other cases, however, the situation doesn't seem to have such a clearly delineated exchange of people; what is seen as soul exchange appears to be less that of people trading the body than a life-changing rite of passage in life of the person in the body. The memories of the walk-in in this case are unbroken, and the person refers to himself in first person when describing both the pre- and post-walk-in lives, rather than only using "I" in reference to the walk-in soul, and talking about the original inhabitant in third person. A good example of this is a woman named Barbara, discussed by Doreen Virtue in *Earth Angels*:

"I decided to kill myself and jump off a bridge. Well, I sat on that wall on the highway overpass and just couldn't do it. I went there three days in a row, and each time, I felt a power push me back....So I took my car and drove it into a telephone pole. But instead of killing myself, I felt someone or something pull the steering wheel back and prevent the suicide." Barbara believes that this "someone or something" is the Walk-In soul who is the current soul inhabiting her body today.⁷⁰

In this case, the person remembers everything both before and after the supposed walking in, quite different from the Otherkin examples in which the before and after are characterized by two different people.

⁶⁹ Teriel, personal correspondence, August 13, 2006

⁷⁰ Virtue, 2002, p. 110-111

One parallel that I find fascinating which really doesn't seem to have been covered extensively in the Otherkin community is the similarities between walk-ins and changelings. In European lore, there is a common motif involving faeries or elves stealing human babies and leaving either one of their own children or a dummy. Two tales, one from Ireland and the other from Iceland follow this pattern. In the former, the changeling is found out by his exclamation of wonder at seeing the mother cooking eggshells: "I'm fifteen hundred years old in the world, and I never saw a brewery of eggshells before!"⁷¹ The Icelandic changeling, on the other hand, when seeing his "mother" stirring a very small pot with a very long pole in it, cries, "I'm a father with eighteen children of my own back in Elfland, and yet never in my life have I seen so long a pole in so small a pot!"⁷² In both cases, the mothers soon recovered their stolen babies safe and sound.

In these stories and ones like them, the changelings are first made suspect when the parents' child suddenly exhibits a dramatic shift in personality, usually a happy baby becoming constantly cranky. Physical illness often results, but with no obvious causes. In the case of walk-ins, a change in personality is often noted by friends and family after the walking in has taken place. While walk-ins don't cause illness in and of themselves, some of them do occur during serious injury or illness to the body. It's also not unlikely that a walk-in soul adjusting to the new body may become temporarily depressed or otherwise unwell for a period until s/he is more settled in.

Multiplicity

A multiple is a group of two or more souls/distinct personalities inhabiting the same body; the entire collection of people is known as a system.⁷³ Some or all of these souls may be types of Otherkin, or they may all be human. Cases vary as to whether the souls shared a body previously, or have even been physically incarnated at all; there's no hard-and-fast rule. Walking in is common among multiples, though not universal. Also, numbers vary as to how many souls are present, ranging from two to a dozen or more. The different people in a system may even arrive in different manners; one anonymous system says that, of those inhabiting their body, one was from a past life, one walked in, and several others were created by other headmates (people in the system). Others may have several possible theories; Malcolm-Rannirl is an example: "[this] body is multiply occupied, and there's no clear

⁷¹ Yolen, 1986, 52

⁷² Yolen, 1986, 54

⁷³ Astraea, unknown.

determination if it's one-spirit-many-minds, many-spirits, a combination of the two or both (one perspective is that I/we are the collected remains of self split across multiple timelines)".

While being Otherkin through multiplicity isn't as common as some other explanations, it is still significant. For one thing, it explains how an otherwise "ordinary" human being can sometimes exhibit feelings of being Other, but not all the time. Also, given that multiples often seek haven among the Otherkin community at large, it's important to understand exactly what multiplicity is and how it contributes to our understanding of the 'kin phenomenon in general.

When some people first encounter the concept of multiplicity, their first reaction is to assume that dissociative identity disorder (DID, alternately known as multiple personality disorder/MPD) is involved. This is a mental condition, related in ways to post-traumatic stress disorder, in which two or more personalities are present in the same person. There is a decided lack of communication among the personalities; if one personality is asked about what occurred when another was at the forefront of the body, the first personality will often have no idea.⁷⁴ Multiplicity is also sometimes confused with schizophrenia, a chemical imbalance in the brain that can adversely affect mental processes. A research test developed by Yale University asks several rather broad questions like "I think that I have felt that there are odd or unusual things going on that I can't explain" and "I believe that I have special natural or supernatural gifts beyond my talents and natural strengths" and then asks the respondent to agree or disagree.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, this sort of diagnosis isn't always limited to online testing, and anyone with any sort of uncommon religious or philosophical belief could be misdiagnosed as schizophrenic.

Multiplicity differs from both of these conditions.⁷⁶ The most remarkable difference from DID is that, generally speaking, multiples experience continual, fluid communication among their personalities so that there is little to no breakdown in "what happened". And, unlike schizophrenia, multiplicity does not respond favorably to antipsychotics, though certain anti-anxiety drugs may be prescribed for what is assumed to be DID.⁷⁷ In addition, people with DID and schizophrenia often experience difficulty functioning in everyday life, whereas multiples generally do not.

⁷⁴ Anonymous, 2005.

⁷⁵ McGlashan, Miller, Woods, et. al., unknown

⁷⁶ Malcolm-Rannell added in personal communication in March 2007 that there is a multiple community separate from the Otherkin community which does not exclude people with MPD/DID, and that the lines may be much more blurred.

⁷⁷ Yank, 2003

This doesn't mean that they (as with Otherkin in general) never question their sanity, or the idea that they are in fact a group of people rather than a single fractured soul. The Doctor, one member of the system known collectively as the Shards, states:

It is entirely possible that the Original [pre-walk-in soul], after spending so many years being abused, finally lost cohesion during that time in the hospital and fragmented into multiple personalities which then developed a fictional context for their existence, actions, and relationships. Some multiples are well-interconnected and functional, some are not; we could be one of the multiples that are. It is entirely possible that the brain injury received either caused or contributed to the fragmentation of the original personality. It is also conceivable that we are the delusion of a badly damaged, barely sane mind that just thinks it is multiple when in fact it could be a convenient excuse/ explanation for doing whatever it is that it feels like (which happens to be what it is that each of us do) or that this state of existence is entirely due to organic brain trauma.

Questioning is healthy but should also be balanced with belief. There's enough evidence collected by multiples themselves to make a strong argument for the many-people-in-one-body explanation; <http://www.kinhos.org> contains a wealth of information from primary sources, for example.

A common misconception is that the various people within a multiple system are just different aspects of the same person. Each persona is a distinct person rather than a one-dimensional character—distinct souls, for those who believe in them.⁷⁸ Occasionally professionals, mistaking multiplicity for DID, will attempt to integrate everyone in the system into one personality. This often doesn't work, and generally when it does, the integration is temporarily effective. The general consensus among multiples seems to be that integration is contrary to their health.⁷⁹ In addition, certain factions within psychology (particularly that derived from the works of Carl Jung) explore the idea that disintegration is healthier in a holistic manner:

We must not, therefore, fall into the trap of assuming that reintegration, or retrieval of lost soul parts is equivalent to elevating psychological unity over plurality, or that retrieval is in all instances desirable, necessary, or appropriate to the mythic context of the therapeutic situation. To denigrate 'dis-integration' as in all instances undesirable is to privilege the still centre over the tension of opposites at the circumference, to promote monotheism above the soul's need for a plurality of gods, to elevate the pristine heights of spirit, as an archetype of unity, over the soul's need for immersion and dispersion in the human sufferings of the vale. It is to set god against god.

⁷⁸ The Blackbirds, et. al., unknown-B

⁷⁹ The Blackbirds, et. al., unknown-A

Apollonian simplicity against Dionysian multiplicity, reason over divine madness, order over chaos, focus over dispersion, coagulation over dissolution. Individually, the gods, after all, are just as likely to be found in one camp as in the other.⁸⁰

Interaction with multiples can be a little startling for the first time, especially if you're not aware of the multiplicity in the first place. For instance, if you're used to dealing with only one person in the body, and then his personality is markedly different the next time you see him, you may very well wonder just what's going on. In my experience, a little time and observation work wonders for surprise. If, after a while, you're still confused about who's fronting (in control of the body), politely ask.

While some people in a system don't give any outward clues beyond behavior and personality when they front, others give subtle or overt hints. Everyday things such as handwriting, vocal inflections, tone or pitch, or the way the body moves, may differ from person to person. I've even witnessed minor changes in facial features and body structure in several multiples I know personally. Some deliberately give clues to the otherwise clueless, particularly in regards to clothing. This may be as simple as a particular piece of jewelry or as complex as an entire wardrobe specifically for that person. A few people pick up on even the smallest clues. "Small children especially can identify different personalities, and react differently to each one, often demanding that they speak with the one(s) they like," says Mela Atreides.

Multiple folk generally prefer to be identified by whoever's fronting at the time when possible; there are usually at least a few circumstances where multiplicity has to be closeted, such as at work. This means more than one name, and quite often more than one set of pronouns. It's a little like a transgendered person who lives as both the male and female aspects of himself depending on what's appropriate. Many, however, have one person who takes over everyday interactions, or whose name is used in public regardless of who's fronting. In a few cases more than one person will front simultaneously.

Otherkin who are multiple often (though not always) include more than one type of 'kin in their systems. This may be a partial answer to the often-degraded "blend-a-'kin", someone who just can't seem to stick with one Other side. Granted, not all blend-a-'kins are multiples, but the possibility should be taken into consideration before writing someone off as a poseur.

It should be noted, as an aside, that both multiples and walk-ins are relatively rare among Otherkin, and that most are single souls who are the original inhabitants of their bodies.

⁸⁰ Roberts PhD, 1998

It's just as possible that this whole Otherkin thing is all in our heads. This isn't however, necessarily a bad thing. Rather, viewing your Otherkin side(s) in this way can be a valuable tool in understanding the various parts of your psyche. After all, every healthy person comes equipped with a full range of emotions and thought patterns; most never use more than a small range of these and say "This is me, but the rest is not" and so the ego is formed. An Other self that is drastically different from the ego could be a personification of certain traits that get repressed otherwise. Because the person feels so strongly that anything outside of the ego is "not me," the sudden appearance of unfamiliar emotions and thoughts can sometimes be translated as an offshoot of the ego. This differs from multiplicity, discussed above, as these are not separate people/souls, but aspects of the same individual.

Personality aspects can come about one of two ways. For some people they are natural divisions within the Self that rise to the surface in the process of introspection. They are not individual souls/people as in multiples; rather, they are personifications of sets of traits that complement each other. For instance, a person who is normally very timid who occasionally exhibits a number of more aggressive traits may find that s/he understands them better as a group rather than as random misfirings in hir behavior. The other way aspecting may be done is deliberately. In *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone* I discussed an experiment in which I deliberately divided up the various, seemingly contradictory, traits in my personality and reassembled them according to the four personality types discussed in Robert Anton Wilson's *Prometheus Rising*⁸¹. Friendly Strength, the confident, outgoing persona, identified with Cat rather than Wolf, identified as female and chose to wear very flashy, attractive clothing. Friendly Weakness, my primary persona at the time, was also female, but remained within my usual lupine identity; she was rather passive and unassuming, and not particularly strong-willed. Hostile Weakness, another Wolf-identified persona, saw himself as male and tended to dress in a goth/punk hybrid wardrobe; he was rather sullen and complained a lot. Hostile Strength, another male persona, identified with Cougar and tended towards fiery-colored clothing; he normally only came out during confrontations.

Now keep in mind, these were all a part of me, rather than being separate personalities. Each of us, though, has all of these basic personae—assertive, passive, aggressive, and complaining. Most of us, however, tend to stay within one or two of these much of the time. My objective with this particular experiment was to be able to move out of

⁸¹ Wilson, 1983, p. 71-75

my favored persona, Friendly Weakness, and balance it out with the other three, as there is a place and time for all of them. So for a six week period I spent each day living solely in a different persona, depending on which one felt most appropriate when I woke up. It was only a temporary measure, but it did serve to help me better understand that my "uncharacteristic" behavior really is a part of me and not some anomaly.⁸²

Conscious use of personality aspects allows the psyche to flex more of its symbolic muscles. As a therian I see myself as both Human and Wolf. I personify the first and second circuits (per Leary) that are involved in the most basic needs of survival and social interaction through lupine terms. However, in modern American culture the more animalistic parts of our psyches are usually curbed except for rare moments in the bedroom or in watching pro sports, or other aggressive activities. In addition, there's an incredible amount of pressure to not only survive but be at the top of the heap in America, which leads to a lot of stress on the first two circuits. This repression leads to a lot of built-up frustration that generally has nowhere to go and often leads to explosions of anger, fear, and other "undesirable" emotions. Therefore the animal part of the mind—which contains the desire to survive and the desire to maintain territory—is often seen as brutish and violent, as is the popular view of Nature as a vicious beast to be tamed. Nature, both inner and outer, is also seen as distinctly separate from human civilization, and only the bravest souls will venture beyond the safety of pavement and trim lawns for any length of time.

In being able to favorably personify my more primitive instincts, thoughts and emotions in a lupine aspect I am able to embody them in that role and thereby embrace rather than reject them. I see myself as both the primitive, animal Wolf, and the tame, civilized Human—I am both, not one or the other. Because I have become more comfortable with the "baser" parts of myself that come naturally no matter how much civilization is applied, I am able to express them not only through violence and aggression, but also through pleasure, security, and relaxation. Animals are not constantly on guard, though they may be constantly aware of their surroundings. They take time to play, to relax, and otherwise give themselves a break from action. Accepting the natural impulses of the human animal as filtered through the language of wolves has helped me to balance out a lot of the unhealthy programming received through cultural conditioning. It has aided me in

⁸² If you wish to try this out for yourself, you can find a more complete version in my essay "Totemic Alchemy" in the *Magick on the Edge* anthology (Immanion Press, 2006). However, I would also highly recommend reading Wilson's *Prometheus Rising* to get the full idea of what I'm talking about.

accepting that yes, I have natural impulses, from the need to be safe and secure to the need to be loved, but that these don't necessarily have to express themselves in negative ways. In this manner the aspecting is a tool by which I can better grasp those traits that might otherwise repulse or scare me.

There are also Otherkin who see their 'kin self as being something that is neurological in nature, hard wired into their brain or at least imprinted heavily at a young age. This is particularly common among some therianthropes. Liesk, who identifies both as coyote and South American marsh deer, is a good example:

I essentially believe it's psychological. I think most therians have some type of atypical neurobiology (and because of certain conditions I know I do), and I believe that at a young age (when the basic identity is developing, that is) this caused me to identify my behaviors as animal as well, not just human, and when reinforced enough this became a solid part of my identity.

This is similar to my own experiences, as I imprinted a lot of wolfish influences starting at the age of two, and while I believe there are also spiritual reasons for my own situation, readers may want to seriously consider this possibility along with others that are more elaborate.

Certain types of Otherkin have occasionally been tied to certain recognized psychological conditions. Clinical lycanthropy, though a very rare psychosis, involves a person who believes himself to be fully transforming permanently into another animal involuntarily. In these cases the person is quite obviously delusional, and the disorder has been reported in conjunction with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and related disorders. To quote a case study, "Psychodynamically this kind of delusion can be interpreted as an attempt to project suppressed affects, especially with aggressive or sexual content, into the figure of an animal."⁸³

There have been a number of cases worldwide of children supposedly raised by wolves. Many of these cases are now believed to have involved autistic children. Lopez relates the following example:

In the 1950s at the Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School of the University of Chicago, psychologists were treating nineteen children... Some of them built dens in the corners of their rooms into which they crawled to eat the raw food they preferred. One of them, a girl, attacked one of the staff repeatedly, and so savagely that the woman required medical attention twelve times in as many months. The children licked salt for hours at a time and loped about the corridors at night, apparently with some

⁸³ Dietrich, Garlipp, Godecke-Koch, & Haltenhof, 2005

*pleasure. These, however, were not children rescued from the woods. They all came from middle-class homes in America. They were severely autistic.*⁸⁴

This leads to the idea that at least a few cases of animal-based Otherkin are tied in with autism-type disorders, Asperger's syndrome being a particularly cited possibility. Solo and Duo are one possible example:

Back when we were seven we were diagnosed with a learning disability which at the time they've identified as Attention Deficit Disorder. This was back in the '80s. However, based on research and access to psychological documents after all these years, it has been determined that this was very likely a misdiagnosis, and what we probably have is something on the autism spectrum, possibly Asperger's. There is actually quite a bit written on the topic of autism and connections with how animals think, which would strongly tie in with Psychological Therianthropy. (Solo)

Again, though, this possibility should not be used to explain all therians; the symptoms even in mild cases of autism/Asperger's are not universally found in any group of Otherkin. Clinical lycanthropy is characterized by dysfunctional behavior and is very rare, so any attempts to tie therians and other types of 'kin to these conditions will quickly run aground.

Still, the connection to animalistic thinking within autism does attach a thread of possibility, however, tenuous, to the idea of all therianthropes, for example, sharing a similar neurobiological quirk. Liesk has an excellent essay on his website about the topic. One point that seems particularly relevant is:

*...while there don't seem to be a much higher number of therians with other atypical neurological functions such as synesthesia, autism, Asperger's, etc., than in the general population, many therians display traits that are similar.*⁸⁵

I highly recommend reading the entire essay, particularly if you are intrigued by the idea of therianthropy in particular being a neurobiological issue.

Psychological theories that try to "explain away" vampirism vary. It could be argued that the need for feeding on blood or energy is entirely a psychological dependency, an addiction to a certain behavior. Or, perhaps, it could be a sexual blood fetish wrapped up in vampiric imagery and character acting. It's often assumed by critical non-'kin that all vampires are essentially roleplayers who took the game too far. But, once again, if we wanted to stick purely with psychology we could

⁸⁴ Lopez, 1978, 244

⁸⁵ Liesk, 2006

basically package all Otherkin up and send us to the madhouse, given our society's standards of acceptable belief and behavior. (Fortunately, forced commitment is no longer as common as it was a century ago.) Once again we need to balance conventional wisdom with personal experience and basic social functionality.

There is also the occurrence of Renfield's syndrome. This is a mental illness in which the patient feels the need to consume blood in order to gain special abilities. Blood fetishism, a particularly strong sexual attraction to blood, is also present to an extreme degree.⁸⁶ It is usually accompanied by numerous other delusions and psychotic behavior, often including mutilation and slaughter of animals and consumption of their blood and body parts, as evidenced by the case of Richard Chase.⁸⁷ As with clinical lycanthropy and other "traditional" explanations, however, Renfield's syndrome is exceedingly rare and should not be looked to as an explanation of vampirism.

Schizophrenia is a favorite accusation of detractors. The problem with using a single condition to explain everyone who identifies as Otherkin is that there's never one that fits every individual. And, again, as mentioned in regards to autism, Otherkin tend to live pretty well integrated into society—some are rather eccentric, but there's not the detachment from society and dysfunctionality often found with confirmed cases of DID, schizophrenia, and related disorders.

One should be careful before assuming that mental "abnormalities" are all bad. There is evidence that several disorders, including schizophrenia, while classified as illnesses in our culture, were considered signs of shamanic ability in earlier societies. One website, "Schizophrenia and Shamanism", goes into detail regarding the correlations between the two experiences, as well as offers resources for further research.⁸⁸ Modern science is showing that the sane have more in common with the insane than was previously assumed. An issue of *National Geographic* describes how "People experiencing romantic love, it turns out, have a chemical profile in their brains similar to that of people who suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder."⁸⁹ Serotonin levels in both the lovers and the OCD patients were 40 percent lower than average.⁹⁰

While there doesn't appear to be any higher occurrence of schizophrenia, OCD, or related disorders in Otherkin than the rest of society, schizotypalism seems to fit a number of Otherkin (as well as people with other nonmainstream beliefs and philosophies). Robert

⁸⁶ Anonymous, 2006-J

⁸⁷ Melton, 1999, p. 710

⁸⁸ See <http://www.madness.crowcity.com/>

⁸⁹ Johns, 2006, no page number

⁹⁰ Slater, 2006, p. 38

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Sapolsky once delivered a speech in which he discussed "schizotypal shamanism" and the idea that the shamans and witchdoctors and other magical folk throughout history are the same as many of today's schizotypal people. He argues that what was once sacred is now a disorder:

What is schizotypal? It's a more subtle version of schizophrenia. This is not somebody who's completely socially crippled; they're just solitary, detached: these are the lighthouse keepers, the projectionists in the movie theaters. These are not people who are thought-disordered to the point of being completely nonfunctional; these are people who just believe in kinda strange stuff.⁹¹

It should be noted, of course, that not all instances of mental illness are connected to metaphysical phenomena. Sometimes false alarms do occur. Kaldera cites one such example: "A local woman began to have 'fits' and talk to unseen spirits. A group of shamans came from miles away to check her out, and declared that she was merely mentally ill; no actual spirits were in evidence."⁹²

Shamanism and other such topics aside, a small number of Otherkin doubt their own sanity (or are doubted by others) to the point of going to therapy sessions. K'hel's opinion of his own experience as a dragon is quite obvious: "Many others have questioned my sanity, most notably the psychiatrist who diagnosed me with paranoid schizo(phrenia?)(typal?) disorder. I think it's 'cuz he had new samples of a drug he wanted to give away, and that's the only diagnosis that my insurance company would accept to pay for the script. I threw 'em away." Others echo the words of Áine: "I don't think the psychological community is at all equipped to handle Otherkin, much less real human problems. I've found that psychologists generally have worse problems than their patients."

Usually, though, those that do end up in therapy are generally there for unrelated issues, such as Ashtara, who is a self-described Wingborn: "I've been to therapy once, on the suggestion of my old principal, because I was having migraines. Apparently her headaches had been 'all in her head', so to speak, so she suggested I see a psychiatrist, who determined I was well-adjusted (The headaches were caused by food allergies.)." Kaijima also reports having passed diagnosis with flying colors:

I can at least say that I have, to date, not been determined to be off my rocker by anyone with the experience or legitimacy to make a real psychological diagnosis. On

⁹¹ Sapolsky, 2003

⁹² Kaldera, unknown

the other hand, I've been interviewed by a psychologist and professor for a university class project who, after a few in-depth conversations, concluded that I was probably more sane than some members of his faculty. He's the man with the degree!

Kistaro, who minored in psychology in college, makes another interesting point:

Before I took Abnormal Psychology, I wondered if it was some form of insanity; after taking it, I had a much better understanding of the concept and can say with great certainty that I'm not currently mentally ill...The DSM-IV-TR has an explicit exception for spiritual beliefs. There are exceptions to the exception, of course, but that would require "immediately contradictory delusions" making an obvious "detachment from reality". I'd have to be convinced somehow that my physical body wasn't human or something. (emphasis hers)

Needless to say, nobody who answered a survey reported being forced into therapy due to being Otherkin. Of the very few who did mention their 'kin status to their therapists, the reaction tended towards acceptance rather than rejection. However, I did interview a professional therapist about her opinion on Otherkin, you may see her ideas in Appendix B. The results aren't nearly what some people fear; in fact, the experience was quite positive!

For the most part, Otherkin who go through the practice of self-examination, which is generally considered a healthy practice anyway, eventually come to the conclusion that acceptance is a lot healthier for them as individuals than repression. The vast majority function as well as anyone else in everyday life. Erelin elaborates: "Sanity, as it is defined, is one's ability to cope with the world around them, given the mental quirks that one has. If one of these quirks makes the person unable to hold a job, pursue normal relationships with other people, or be a danger to him/herself or others, then they are insane." If Otherkin seem to be more prone to actual mental disorders such as depression, perhaps it is only because they're more open to discussing it. And as for Otherkin-identity being an unusual belief, Vellos, a dragon, says, "As I've said before, who are others to claim my beliefs are no less valid as say worshipping a 'creator' that no one can see or prove exists?"

Personal Mythology, Imagination and Metaphor

Most people think that Elfin is a place that exists outside of the elfin, in the same way that Ireland exists. And while there is some truth to this it is equally true to say that Elfin lives and breathes within the elfin. Elfin is a state of being. Not merely a place nor a consciousness (although it is both of these). To enter Elfin one must be

able to "shift their assemblage point", to alter their consciousness at will, to melt the synaptic pathways and create new neural templates imprinted with the reality of Elfin.⁹³

Before I discuss my own thoughts on this particular theory, I want to allow Chris Carter to explain just what "personal mythology" is. I first came across the term through a post he made on the Barbelith.com forums back in 2003. As I know him personally, I was able to pick up more details here and there in talking to him in person and online. Finally, when considering who I should have as the guest essayist for this book, I decided to let him wax on the subject further. And so, without further adieu, here is Chris's take on personal mythology:

We recognize our spirit as great and unique, sacred and eldritch, fantastic and special. We should expect no less from something immortal. But yet, here we are trapped in this limited mortal existence, and we deserve to question why and how this came to be. Something does not fit in the explanations society has given us, so we explore our feelings, dreams, and visions for clues to the reasons we came to be that give our lives meaning and sometimes even purpose. These are our stories. They grant us a sense of how we fit into the greater workings of the universe. They validate our existence. Most importantly, for those of us certain of spiritual origins other than that of general humanity, they offer supporting evidence to this assertion. For even if we do not feel the need to prove ourselves to others, in the face of challenging paradigms it is important to reinforce our convictions and find proof for ourselves.

The purpose of mythology is to explain one's origins and place in the world, and offer answers to questions of how the world functions around us. Often, this is done through the device of the supernatural to abstractly give answers that today might be offered more discretely through scientific observation. Its purpose, however, is the same: to provide answers. It might not go to the level of detail offered by modern science. However, the answers given are based on observations and are internally consistent. This is what gives the wisdom within the story validity, that it is providing a working answer to a question that remains consistent with observed phenomena.

Mythology takes the form of stories. Sometimes, the purpose of a story is to describe the nature of a character through their interaction with others. When characters are representative of natural forces, such as is often the case in mythic stories, the drama of these forces interacting describes the function of natural phenomena. Information is thus encoded within the allegorical dramas that help to define the

⁹³ Silver Elves, 2001, 187-188

workings of reality. Thus, questions like "Does the sun move across the sky?" are given answers in the form of a story about how the sun god rides across the sky in a golden chariot. Other times, the sequence of events is more important, recording the history of persons, characters, or a place. Often, it is the history of a people or culture that is recorded.

The stories are colorful, and the characters take on familiar traits of personality we can relate to. This relation allows us to more easily remember the story, to pass it on and keep it alive, and also to interpret the keys of wisdom encoded within. When we hear the story we relate to it, and we experience it within ourselves. The story creates a reality. It defines that reality, and brings it to life through the interaction of storyteller and listener. It creates worlds within us.

One important story is that of the creation of the world. The question of origins is ever one of the most highly sought, for how can we understand our place in the present without the history of the past to give it context? Personally, we have memory of our own life experience. Culturally, we have the history of those that have come before. This history is recorded as well in story and in myth. But we ask further of what was before even our history, and create the answer in creation myths.

The story begins with the story of the world, and the great forces that moved it into being. No mythology is complete without a creation myth. It gives the setting in which the story of culture is set. It is the background. It defines the rules of reality. It answers the question of why reality exists in the first place. It lays the way by which we have come from the nothingness of origin to the present, and projects by which we shall continue into the future. It is also about a topic completely beyond our comprehension, and thus is a tale of abstract and fantastical supernatural elements nonexistent in the mundane reality of today.

As the world within is a mirror to the world above, so too do many of us create our own stories to define where we came from. We develop our own creation myths. We define stories of who and what we are, and where we came from to satisfy the unanswerable questions we all long to uncover. As culture creates mythology to describe its own origins and place, so too do we create personal mythologies to explain our own origins on the spiritual level.

A Personal Mythology is any story explaining one's personal spiritual origins or identity. It may not even be a story, so much as an internal understanding. For as a story creates an internal reality, so too is an internal reality expressed as a story, even if it is never actually told. When one begins to work in magic, they are working against common reality and often have need for an internal reality to justify their work.

This themselves common reality. When one rejects the mythology is necessary to begin the process of discovery. One basis of faith in the self, can be escapist or delusional magic.

Thus for a magic importance as it justifies reality, for any mere mortal be the reincarnation of from the city of heaven extra soul, or a fantastic known many magicians common among them: set apart from humanity. I think we are younger. But some something greater, some mythology, when we decide and what we are. And become

Stories are themselves ourselves as characters. As strength of our story itself create a personal reality in presses against "objective" outside reality, allowing the magic to happen.

So this practice is the magic of Identity. It is the mythology of our own worlds around us. It is a reality we all possess it in some form we make use of this tool beyond.

(We now return you to the Delfynava, who I think of it as a "click" sound.)

This is all the more important when one comes to understand themselves as a sort of being other than human, further rejecting the common reality. The mythology of culture defines this common reality. When one rejects the cultural mythology around them, their personal mythology is necessary to replace it for themselves. So, one through necessity begins the process of justifying this existence and how it can occur in this reality. One begins to create a personal mythology through the process of discovering and defining their own nature. This is the basis of faith in the self, of identity, and ability. It is as empowering as it can be escapist or delusional when taken too far, as with any working of magic.

Thus for a magician, one's personal mythology has an added importance as it justifies his power and his ability to violate the laws of reality, for any mere mortal surely can not do these things. So, he must be the reincarnation of an ancient Egyptian pharaoh, an angel fallen from the city of heaven slumming it here on earth, one possessed of an extra soul, or a fantastical creature such as an elf or dragon. I have known many magicians of all different sorts, and one thing is very common among them: secret stories of their True Nature that set them apart from humanity. I think we all do it to some degree, especially when we are younger. But sometimes we keep with the story. We evolve it into something greater, something real. That is when fantasy becomes mythology, when we decide it is true and support it with faith. It is who and what we are. And because of this, we can do what we do.

Stories are themselves realities. We create a story and insert ourselves as characters. As the story touches the epic, so too do we. The strength of our story itself is empowering to magic, supporting it. We create a personal reality in which the laws are different. As this reality presses against "objectivity", the force of our will imposes it upon the outside reality, allowing the rules within to take effect without, and thus magic to happen.

So this practice is more than escapist fantasy, more than delusion. It is the magic of Identity. It is the empowerment of personal magic. It is the mythology of our own reality, through which we interact with the worlds around us. It is a necessary part of each and every one of us, and we all possess it in some form. The only question is to what degree do we make use of this tool to define our own path through life and beyond.

(We now return you to your regularly scheduled Lupa.)

Delfynasa, who has both elven and selkie heritage, says that "Sometimes I think of it as a metaphor for why I and many others just don't seem to 'click' with the madness of 21st century 'civilization'...It may be we

feel off and odd and the things we read in fantasy novels just makes more sense...Just a whole different outlook and soul inside a shell pretending to be like everyone else." This introduces the idea that perhaps some Otherkin aren't so much literal as metaphorical.

As I discussed in the first chapter, the suspension of disbelief inherent to play is also that which is found in rituals worldwide and throughout time. Mythology is not merely some made-up stories that people told before science explained how the Cosmos *really* works. Rather, if we follow the paths laid by Jung, Campbell, and others, we find the symbols that are not limited to our psychology, but have a life of their very own. And, in the words of Campbell, "One is linked to one's adult role, that is to say, by being identified with a myth—participating actually, physically, oneself, in a manifestation of mythological forms, these being visibly supplied by the roles and patterns of the rite, and the rite, in extension, supporting the form of the society".⁹⁴ In this passage he is referring to everyday rites of passage, costumery and other items associated with modern manifestations of ancient archetypes. He explains that everything from the black robes worn by judges to the military uniform of a soldier—in fact, any trappings that belong to a particular profession or social role—invoke that role and its associated mythos and symbolism.

With the advent of science as the primary tool for explaining the whys and hows of the physical world, mythology became mere stories, removed from the "real" world by the veil of the five senses in ordinary consciousness. Once we found out that the sun was a huge burning ball of gas millions of miles away, we supposedly no longer needed the myths of Apollo, Amaterasu, and other solar deities to explain anything beyond ancient cultural storytelling. The moon, as well, was no longer a huntress, or a rabbit, or an incestuous lover with his sister's fingerprints on his back, just a huge lump of cold rock with not a bit of life on its surface. Even Robert Graves, in the foreword of his revision of *The Greek Myths*, explained away the joy of the Bacchanalia:

*The evidence...suggests that Satyrs (goat-totem tribesmen), Centaurs (horse-totem tribesmen), and their Maenad women folk, used these brews [wine and ivy ale] to wash down...amanita muscaria [a mushroom] which induces hallucinations, senseless rioting, prophetic sight, erotic energy, and remarkable muscular strength...followed by complete inertia, a phenomenon that would account for the story of how Lycurgus, armed only with an ox-goad, routed Dionysus' drunken army of Maenads and Satyrs after its victorious return from India.*⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Campbell, 1984-B, 117

⁹⁵ Graves

Does this then mean that all those who claim to be satyrs, centaurs, and, indeed, any mythological being that can be “explained away” in such a manner are then automatically delusional? Not necessarily. Perhaps all the evidence we have points away from literal satyrs, centaurs, and their ilk ever having physically inhabited this plane of existence. That doesn’t exclude their potential lives on other planes.

The Collective Unconscious of Jung is a good starting place. It is theorized that in this place, which is not physical but exists nonetheless, we have access to all concepts of reality, our own and those of others, given form through our individual interpretations of archetypes and motifs inherited through human evolution. Many do not consider this to be an actual place, as it can’t be attained through physical means. However, the imagination and dreams are the vehicles by which we are able to travel to these alternate realities.

Belief is also an active tool for accessing realities rather than just an emotional pacifier. As Jung, Campbell, and others have stressed, mythology exists on many levels. Most of us are familiar with the words on paper, or the pixels on the television or computer screen, that convey the stories told for millennia in many tongues and with many names. However, the power behind those myths is in the reactions that we have to them and the effects they have on our world—as well as our ability to capture that power and use it to create our own reality. Campbell argues that while yes, we are to an extent influenced by our responses to external stimuli, we do create our interpretation of our environment, both physically and otherwise.⁹⁶ This supports the idea that “reality” is not just an objective environment to which we automatically react, but something that we have an active hand in shaping.

This idea is reflected in the mind-bending works of Robert Anton Wilson who, inspired by Leonard Orr, touts the saying “Whatever the Thinker thinks, the Prover proves”.⁹⁷ The background to this idea is based on the division of the mind into the Thinker, which comes up with ideas, and the Prover, whose sole purpose is to hunt down whatever evidence there is to support the Thinker’s claims. This works for everyone, even people who hold opposing viewpoints from each other—the Prover is so good at what it does, and the Universe is so obliging in its offerings of proof for everything. This is why we end up with so much contradictory evidence for just about every argument you can think of. The end result is that there is no objective reality except for a close call arrived at by the thinking and proving of multitudes who end up, more or less, in the same ball park, albeit with disagreements in the details.

⁹⁶ Campbell, 1984-B, p. 76

⁹⁷ Wilson, 1983, p. 25

So let us assume that reality is much more flexible than our own tunnel vision generally supposes, and that we have an active hand in creating our reality, as well as access to numerous, if not infinite, versions of reality created by ourselves and by others. The theme of accessing these realities via magic and ritual runs through Taylor Ellwood's works, hearkening back to Campbell's assertion that ritual is the key to the altered states of consciousness that lead us to corresponding altered states of reality. "Consider, for instance, that many magicians believe in other planes or universes of existence. Obviously, these universes don't exist in our universe, but to access them we manipulate space/time, and though we may not physically go to these other planes of existence (as far as we know), we nonetheless interact with them, because of the warping of space/time"⁹⁸ Ellwood, however, in later works applies this concept microcosmically as well as macrocosmically:

*Nothing in Inner Alchemy occurs solely on any one level. The major theme of this book is interconnectedness. A lot of my work on the energetic level has happened as a result of work I've done on the physiological and even genetic level, with the goal being to shape the body even as my energy is shaped. By learning to work with your DNA and also apply your understanding of DNA to a level beyond just the physical existence of it you can do a lot of inner alchemy. In turn you can achieve an appreciation of not just your own genetic heritage, but how that heritage interacts with everything else. You can fine tune that heritage as well, making changes in your body that allow you to maximize your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual potentials. You just need to be open to the idea that the body can be controlled on a variety of levels despite what western science and medical health would have you believe."*⁹⁹

And here we have a new way of interpreting the old alchemical maxim, "As above, so below". For if we can access the emotional, spiritual, and mental personal universe through the physical vehicle of our flesh, what is to say we can't also access the macrocosmic universe as well, using ritual as a way to expand our awareness beyond the limitations of our own physical reality and into the reality of every other living being that exists?

What, you may be wondering, does all this reality-bending have to do with Otherkin? If we accept the theory that reality is more than just what our own five physical senses can access, and that reality is more subjective than is often assumed, and that we can access reality beyond our own limitations, then we have the possibility of being connected to any reality we wish, in conjunction with the physical reality that we are

⁹⁸ Ellwood, 2005, p. 30

⁹⁹ Ellwood, 2007

native to. For, with ritual as the vehicle for access these different realities, we exist in more than one reality simultaneously. The shaman who travels out of his body to retrieve the soul of an ill patient may be physically existent on the reality of everyday life and the rest of humanity; however, his consciousness travels through an entirely different plane of existence. The two come together dependent upon the success of the journey—if the soul is brought back, the patient recovers, whereas if the soul is lost, the patient will die.

The effect that this acting out of ritual—the “make believe” discussed in the first chapter—ultimately has is to change our everyday lives. Rites of passage found worldwide serve not only to induct the initiate into a particular level of mundane society, but they also trigger changes on the psychological and spiritual levels. This cannot be done entirely within physical reality. Rather, the suspension of disbelief that allows us to access other realities must be achieved, or the ritual doesn’t work. The other realities must be made imminent in this one, with permanent effects.

Perhaps for some Otherkin, the very acknowledgement of being Other and bringing that into everyday life is an ongoing ritual. It may not be acknowledged as such; however, it is an action that allows the person to access a reality other than the physical, human one on a permanent basis. This is particularly noteworthy, given that in a lot of modern postindustrial cultures there are no formal rites of passage outside of certain religions—and they are much tamer than those of Paleolithic cultures, in which initiates were often terrified half to death, physically mutilated in some way, or otherwise drastically shaken up to change them in a desired manner for good. Even the rites of passage in secular American culture, such as getting your driver’s license, losing your virginity and becoming of legal voting and drinking ages are not generally celebrated as a community. Often the sense of new responsibility is lost as well, the result manifesting in teenaged drivers getting into wrecks for driving too quickly, accidental pregnancies due to a lack of knowledge about proper use of birth control, and underaged drinking out of rebellion.

We are a society left to grow up on our own with little community guidance, and we lack a centralized cultural mythology. Additionally, we are very individual-oriented. Perhaps the Otherkin identity, at least in the United States, is an answer to the lack of cultural mythology, processed through individualistic socialization.

Campbell makes another pertinent point in *Oriental Mythology*. He describes the basic, generalized differences in Occidental and Oriental approaches to mythology and belief. Whereas in the former God is seen as intrinsically separate from humanity and all of creation in a manner which he describes as “geographical, historical”, the latter sees that

division as being merely "psychological", and we need only to lift the veil of *maya* to see that God truly is everything.¹⁰⁰ Since most Otherkin were raised with a more or less Occidental attitude towards belief (though their beliefs may have changed), it is entirely possible that what is often explained as something left over from a separate life in linear space/time may simply be the divine within. In other words, we are not separated from our "past life" as the Other—it is imminent within us in this life. The spark of the Divine that we call elf, or wolf, or dragon, is not a remnant of a life far removed from the now, but is a way for us to realize that we *are* that Divine now. Because of our need for storytelling and the lack of relevant mythology in this day and age, we parcel the Other into a category that differs from the mundane world, hence *making* it the Other. Instead, perhaps it is healthiest if we, instead of seeing the Other as something from another life, we accept it as a part of this one, personified through archetypal imagery.

This doesn't mean that we should assume that all identification as Other should be taken purely metaphorically. However, it is one level of possibility that shouldn't be ignored. Nicholas Graham, author of *The Four Powers*, wrote an essay in his blog that captures the idea of the Collective Unconscious—part of that which is attained by all forms of ritual, formal or informal—flowing into our own "solid" reality. He makes the point that it is entirely possible that because of the lack of a cohesive cultural mythology in many postindustrial societies, that the archetypes and motifs of mythology are making themselves known via certain people who are able to channel them on a day to day basis. This reflects the observation that anything in our psyche—collective as well as personal—which is repressed for too long will eventually find its own means of expression, whether we like it or not. Graham goes on to mention that it is quite possible that those Otherkin who have fallen into pure delusion have lost their connection to the archetypes they were initially channeling, perhaps unable to sustain such a long term shift in "normal" reality. He concludes with this thought:

The most important factor to remember when examining the possibility of delusive behavior in Otherkin is that humans, by their very natures, desire personal mythology. From time immemorial, humans have sought ways of more fully interacting with the spirits and energized archetypes with whom they interacted. Often, this is done by self-mythologizing or, in other words, living out a personalized version of the mythology of an archetype. Jung suggested (also in An Answer to Job) that this is a natural process in the lives of most people. He went on to suggest that it forms the foundation of the almost universal (culturally, not individually) belief in fate or destiny; as we live in a manner congruent with the chosen archetype (god, goddess,

spirit), not only do our psychic lives change in accordance but so too do our material lives through the efforts of these spirits and gods. I cannot overstress the importance of this factor in the psycho-spiritual study of Otherkin.¹⁰¹

While the idea of accessing alternate realities is ancient, there is a specific modern manifestation of it known as Soulbonding.

Soulbonding appears to be a hybridization of imagination and the belief in alternate/parallel realities. It has been theorized that fiction is nothing less than a channeling of an existing alternate reality. Taylor Ellwood, for example, mentions this in *Space/Time Magic*:

*[W]hen a writer writes about a fantasy world, s/he is either creating that world in alternate reality, or, more likely, tapping into that alternate reality...It's my thought that writing, being a very intuitive practice (when done creatively) leads people to tap into other realities, other versions of the self...Some writers also note that characters seem to be alive and have their own personalities, which consequently affect their writing. Perhaps this is because they have actually connected with an alternate self, and are transcribing that self's experiences into writing that we consider fantasy or SF [science fiction]. In contacting this self, the author becomes a medium for a polyphony of other characters, transcribing the voices of many into the reality of the word.*¹⁰²

First defined by writer Amanda Flowers, Soulbonding most often occurs between a writer and a character s/he is writing about, though that character may not necessarily be of his own creation.¹⁰³ Soulbonders consciously allow their Soulbonds (characters)—whether they believe them to be independent entities or not—to interact with them and become a part of them on a daily basis; in some cases, in the same way a multiples, the original soul of the body may front less than the Soulbond.¹⁰⁴ Whether the Soulbonds originate with the Soulbonder or not, there is often a created environment in which all parties involved interact, often known as a Soulscape.¹⁰⁵ This manner of being/becoming Otherkin is of particular interest when discussing Mediakin, found in Chapter 7.

While personal mythology and alternate realities do not necessarily represent the experiences of all Otherkin, they are intriguing possibilities, particularly for those who don't necessarily believe in literal reincarnation, but who don't believe that reality is singular.

¹⁰¹ Graham, 2006

¹⁰² Ellwood, 2005, p. 94-5

¹⁰³ Wainwright, unknown

¹⁰⁴ Corin Wainwright, personal communication, May 14, 2006

¹⁰⁵ Wainwright, unknown

In this model, Otherkin could be seen as resonating strongly with the energy of what Jung termed "archetypes". He defines them as "an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious, indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere".¹⁰⁶ In an energetic sense, every person, place, and thing is infused with energy which is unique to it. This includes archetypes, memories, and pure information. Therefore when a person taps into an archetype s/he is accessing not only the idea of the archetype but the energy thereof. This energy can be adapted into a person's energy signature. While the individual signature usually remains more or less consistent, it can be consciously manipulated on a permanent basis. Since we agree that a certain energy means "elf" or "mouse" or "gryphon," at least on a subconscious level, then those who resonate with those energies will tend to identify with the labels and traits we apply to them.

Taylor Ellwood, in *Inner Alchemy*, explains how the concept of being able to shift one's energy by will on a microstructural basis changes the energy signature. He makes a brief mention specifically of Otherkin but it is obvious that most of the concepts he describes may be used to strengthen or even create a bond with a particular nonhuman species.

Much of it is a matter of shifting your own energy's resonance to that of the type of being you want to connect with. The difference between this and a simple, one-time invocation, however, is that Ellwood puts forth the practice of actually binding that energy permanently to yourself. He does caution that you need to be fully aware of what it is you are binding yourself to: "[B]y doing this process you are undergoing transformation on all levels of your body. You are inviting the influence of other entities into you. Make sure you trust those entities."¹⁰⁷

Many of us do strengthen the energy bonds unconsciously. Anything we do that reminds us of our 'kin sides, whether it's collecting relevant artwork, dressing the part or invoking that aspect of ourselves in magic, ties it deeper to our very being. It's more than a matter of psychology; there are noticeable increases in nonhuman energy within your personal energy signature. It can, however, be done consciously as well, and on a more microcosmic level.

Ellwood puts forth both theory and practical examples of consciously changing the resonance of one's biophotonic energy

¹⁰⁶ Jung, unknown

¹⁰⁷ Ellwood, 2007, p. 108

through one's own cells and DNA. This energy is what's behind all energy work, from Reiki to psychic vampirism. It's emitted by the very microstructures of our body and with effort we can consciously adjust it.

He explains how he used this ability to bind the five Western elements (Earth, Air, Fire, Water, Spirit) to the different DNA segments in his body. Initially he bound one element to one type of segment (Earth to guanine, for example) and Spirit to all four, but at a later point instead connected all segments to all elements for balance. This gave him a stronger innate bond to each of the five elements and thereby better success with elemental magic: "The end goal of the working was to not only attune my DNA to the elemental energy, but also get the DNA to act as a gateway for that energy."¹⁰⁸

While this sort of DNA magic can't be traced by geneticists it does create a noticeable shift in a person's energy over time for those who are sensitive to it. The magic doesn't need to be limited simply to elemental energies; Otherkin who wish to strengthen their connection to their Other selves may wish to utilize this sort of magic to alter their biophotonic energy to more resemble the Other.

Energy also plays a strong role in vampirism. Vampires require energy from external sources (as opposed to the natural absorption of ambient energy, and that attained through the digestion of food). It is commonly theorized that this is because of an inability to process energy normally, whether through an inherent flaw or through damage to the body's energy processing system.¹⁰⁹

It's also possible that energy blockages, places in the energetic body where things aren't flowing in a healthy manner, could upset the ability to absorb and process energy. Ellwood postulates that this could be caused by pollution in one's environment. While most people are aware of physical pollution, not so many notice the resulting energetic pollution. Just as physical toxins contribute to cancer and other illnesses, perhaps toxins in the energetic environment can contribute to some cases of vampirism.¹¹⁰

Magic and Spirituality

Otherkin may also be understood through magic and spirituality. Kira seems to have inherited her elven nature through being, as Jarandhel says, "kin to the other". Part of it may have been ancestral heritage from her Celtic and Norwegian roots which came from cultures heavily

¹⁰⁸ Ellwood, 2007, 105

¹⁰⁹ Kaldera, 2005, 12-14

¹¹⁰ Ellwood, 2007, 156-157

steeped in elven and/or faerie lore. However, she adds this interesting piece of information:

When I was a teenager, I did a bit for some Otherworld sidhe, mainly because they were interesting, beautiful, etc? and I was living in the middle of nowhere and bored senseless (well, you do have to be somewhat lacking in sense to work for Them!) I've been a practicing magician since I was 13, sensitive to energy flows and spirits, and learned a good bit from them ... after a while I started finding it painful to hold or touch iron, and the tips of my ears got extremely sensitive/ticklish. When I started working with energy manipulation, if I got the juice going I'd feel a spinning/pulsing sensation in the middle of my forehead; now I feel it at the ear tips too, or sometimes primarily, depending on what's going on. To clarify, my contact with them has been on the astral and etheric levels, and a number of other people have seen or heard things related to it.

Kira's husband, Anton, explains his connection to his feline aspect as spiritual, but within a certain cultural context that reflects his beliefs, which he describes as "Nordic Reconstructionist Heathen (Asatru)":

In the context of Otherkin, my primary association would be as a therianthrope, with specific relation to the Felidae-family, particularly Puma concolor and Panthera leo spelaea (extinct since between 2000 and 10000 years ago). Also with additional secondary tendancies towards the Northern European Alfar (Nordic/Germanic) or Sidhe (Irish Celtic). The soul-lore of the Northern Cultures was rather complex and convoluted but the animal part of the soul, similar to the totem concept of other circum-polar cultures, was called the fylgja or "fetch", which meant "follower". Berserkers ("Bear-shirts") would have bear fetches, ulfhedinn (wolf men) would have had wolf fetches, I've heard rumors of there being a similar warrior cult with cat or lion associations (possibly related to the Germanic Chiatti tribe) but I can't think of any literary accounts off hand and only a single statue from one of the coastal islands off of Ireland depicting a lion-headed man. These cults were explicitly tied to the worship of Odin, who coincidentally has "ruled my head" for as long as I can remember.

Erynn has had experiences that have led her to consider the possibility that she is a therian that are linked to magical work she's done in the past, and that therianthropy isn't necessarily fully divorced from the historical lore surrounding shapeshifters:

The two major forms that I manifest -- bobcat and crow/raven -- are from the spirits that entered my body during a very intense Otherworld/Dreamworld experience many years ago. In that experience, the feline spirit opened up my back with its claws, and it and an avian spirit entered through that opening. When they entered, my back

closed up again. I didn't understand what was going on, and when I asked a friend about this, he said that it's actually something very much in line with Northwest Native tradition, and that people often do spiritual work for years, or even for an entire lifetime, trying to have that experience.

I would say that generally, my understanding of the process and its origin is totemistic and, to a certain extent, shamanistic as well, though I do not identify as a shaman. I've studied Siberian shamanism in some depth, however, and can see where there are some connections between what they describe and what I find happens to me. I can't say that I know why this has happened, only that it has, and that it has been a positive experience for me...

There are others outside the Otherkin community who I think are possibly/probably therianthropes, but who approach it through the warrior mysteries of Celtic cultures and the relation of the Fianna¹¹ with wolves and werewolfing, which I really do consider an entirely different sort of phenomenon. In those cases, the werewolfing in part seems to bear resemblance to "animal styles" in Asian martial arts, and to the sort of Dreamworld work that I do, including spirit-travel and out of body experiences. I tend to be able to take those folk far more seriously...

I think it's probably useful to look at the phenomenon in terms of totemism and animistic spirituality, at least for many people. I do think that people can balance the animal and human spiritual realities, and use the whole complex to grow as sentient beings, but that it takes a lot of work and a good grasp on reality. It also takes a lot of time and research, as well as experience in Dreamwork and spirit travel.

There are some interesting parallels among the testimonies of Kira, Erynn, and Anton. All three have heavily researched the cultures that their Otherkin natures are linked to, and those cultures are strong influences on them. So it's not at all surprising that the culturally-based spiritual lore that each works with helps to explain what is Other about them.

There is a strong trend towards the spiritual in all three examples. Kira works directly with entities in the Otherworld, Anton brings up the idea of the "fetch" as a part of the soul, and Erynn describes a shamanic experience that led to her therianthropy. Additionally, both Anton and Erynn bring up similar traditions in their respective cultures of interest, particularly those associated with warriors and the animal spirituality and symbolism associated with them. And Erynn and Kira both speak of

¹¹ It should be noted that Erynn is not speaking of the White Wolf werewolf tribe, but rather the Fianna of Finn MacCumhail in Irish Celtic mythology. Erynn is a Celtic Reconstructionist, a modern pagan paradigm that is particularly concerned with accurate historical research as opposed to Celtic-inspired spirituality.

external spirit guides either becoming internalized, or having a very strong influence on them.

It's always possible that for some, being Otherkin is a way of manifesting and explaining phenomena that are traditionally shamanic—with some changes, of course. As Graham and I touched on in the section on personal mythology, since we live in a society that doesn't have a complete cultural mythos, perhaps the elements of myth manifest through our lives.

I would like to add further the point that as we live in a very individualized society, with focus on developing the self as a contained entity rather than one part of a whole, our interpretations of earlier cultures is unique. In *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone*, I explored how totemism changes from a traditional group-based society to an individualized neopagan subculture. The concept of a clan or tribal totem is unusable by most neopagans, who have not grown up in a totemistic setting, and who are either solitary or work with a group that does not incorporate a group totem or other egregore. Neopagan totemism is almost wholly focused on the individual and how the totem(s) interact with hir.

This self-centeredness could also characterize Otherkin in a shamanic manner. Perhaps the Other, in some cases, is a spirit guide manifesting internally rather than externally, because in most cultures where Otherkin are found, there isn't much context for external spirit guides. In these cases, "memories" could actually be journeys to the Otherworld facilitated by the internalized spirit guide who, since it is a part of the Otherkin, gives the journey a particularly personal feel. Additionally, as noted on Otherkin.net, the experience of shamanic shapeshifting and other work in conjunction with an animal spirit guide—whether of this world or not—can lead to associating the self with that animal.¹¹²

Granted, many Otherkin do work magic and practice belief systems that allow for external spirit guides. However, most neopagans not raised in a pagan faith have to do some reworking of the tunnel vision they were raised with, which is generally Christianity from the family (magic is blasphemous) and science from school (magic is impossible). And many Otherkin first become aware of being Other to some extent while they're still in a Christian and/or scientific mindset. Therefore, the spirit guide, rather than manifesting externally (where it might be mistaken for a demon or delusion), manifests internally, where it won't be ignored.

Also, some forms of magic, particularly those that are shamanic in nature, sometimes lead the practitioner to develop much more fluid

¹¹²Anonymous, unknown-B

boundaries between the ego and the rest of the world. Many forms of magic across various paradigms have a goal of dissolving the ego, the clichéd "becoming One with the Universe". Therefore the idea of identifying a spirit guide as being both microcosmic and macrocosmic isn't uncommon from a magical perspective. In my own case, for example, when I call on the totemic archetype of Wolf, I am simultaneously calling on the corresponding, therianthropic part of myself that also identifies as lupine in nature. This is also a parallel to traditional cultural views of community where, although a person was recognized as an individual, hir place in society was often even more important. Because in modern culture where Otherkin are most often found tend to be highly individualized not only about other people, but other things, it's not surprising to consider that perhaps at least a few Otherkin came about because of the necessity of internalizing the bond with a guide from the Otherworld.

On the other hand, this may not be as new a concept as first thought. Ravenari practices vilturj, a form of shamanism that although hybridized in its current form does draw from a very deep cultural well in Russia. She makes this apt observation:

Also, when it comes to totems, they are already inside of us, they are who we are. They are not our spirit 'helper' (usually), they do not often take us through the otherworlds, they do not do much more than reflect our nature and personality. Like our clan totem, they help us to access ourselves, our power, our nature (or the nature of our ancestors, their power, and their nature), but they reside within - with the often external manifestation in the otherworlds. I suppose if someone wasn't aware of the multitude of other guides people often have around them, then the totem would be responsible for this for journeying and healing as well.¹¹³

In addition, she also remarks that some of the indigenous cultures of Australia, where she lives, deliberately internalize their totems, and that many shamanic traditions view the spirit guide as being both microcosmic and macrocosmic.¹¹⁴ This is exactly what Balthazar has done:

Totemism, i.e. relating to an animal species as a co-equal and as a teacher of nature's ways. I began 'feeling like' different species of birds as a teenager, and personified ('became') them. It felt so natural!...Each species change/addition was precipitated by real-life changes and indicated to me through extremely vivid dreams.

¹¹³ Ravenari, personal communication, September 21, 2006

¹¹⁴ Ravenari, personal communication, September 21, 2006

It may also be advantageous to take the idea of invocation into consideration as a possible theory. After all, most of the beings that 'kin claim to be exist quite well outside of human bodies; many magic users believe faeries, dragons, and other such entities exist independently of our world and can be worked with in a ritual setting. While many evoke these beings (call them into a ritual area), others temporarily invoke them (call them into their own bodies). A similar concept is found in certain Afro-Caribbean religions, most notably Voodoo, in which the faithful may be possessed by the *loa*, powerful spirits who are intermediaries between humans and the Divine. Invocation differs from possession, however, in that in the former, the human being still retains control over his body, whereas in the latter the *loa* reigns supreme.

While invocation is generally thought of as being a temporary thing, it does demonstrate the idea of a nonhuman entity residing within a human body. In addition, Ellwood maintains that after an invocation, some of the energy of the spirit remains within the body, making subsequent invocations easier as the spirit has something to guide it back in.¹¹⁵ Additionally, invocation can occasionally be a permanent thing; later on, I'll discuss Heron's experience in this regard. Tysha, the walk-in dragon whose experience was discussed in the last chapter, is additionally a good example, as Tracey, the original human soul, still shares her body with her.

Theoretically, invocation may be used in conjunction with the DNA/energy resonance work mentioned above to become Otherkin (though some would debate this possibility), or to strengthen your connection to your 'kin side. Calling on the spirits externally can draw out correlating energies internally, or a spirit may be invited to share a body permanently. It's even possible that evocation and invocation can be used to contact others of your type from past/alternate lives in order to increase the bond with "home" or to learn more about your 'kin side. Some therians, for example, work with the totem that is the same animal as their animal self, though this is not universal; some therians who practice totemism may have a totem that is an entirely different animal from what they themselves identify as.

To read more about these ideas, including elaboration on invocation and evocation, please see Chapter 8, "Spirituality and Magic".

Who Knows? Who Cares?

Some folks haven't figured out the origin of their Otherkin natures. Others really don't concern themselves with it. These two groups actually comprise a fairly sizable portion of the Otherkin community.

¹¹⁵ Ellwood, 2007, p. 166

For the former, there may simply not be enough evidence. The latter often feel they have better things to occupy their time, such as figuring out how they can use their 'kin energy magically or what the kids are going to want for supper. And, in the words of the Silver Elves, "Whether there was in the historical actual past, any group of people who centered their identity vision focus within the vibrational realm we call elven, is not in truth, significant... If there never were previously, there are now!"¹¹⁶

Figuring Out from Whence We Came

"I'm not entirely sure. I do think that it has a lot to do with my ethnic origins as well as personifications of my personality. I may be back from a past life, but given how old I feel (even though I'm a young 20 year old sprout to most) I think I may have gone dormant and then decided to start a new life in a different form. But who knows." So says Lysander Dominique Bretodeau, a satyr. As a young child he expressed some memories through hypnotic regression from the perspective of an Irish immigrant heading to New York, stating details that first graders generally haven't learned about yet. He continues, "The memories are consistent with the histories of my people, and some of the stories of my ancestors... I test my memories against histories and such." He describes a healthy practice; it's not at all uncommon for 'kin to keep several possibilities in mind when going through self-exploration, and only narrow it down to one after many months or even years, if ever.

On the other hand, it can be tempting to latch onto a theory simply for security's sake. Some 'kin feel that in order to be legitimate they have to know exactly where they came from, who they were, and all the other details that prove their Otherkin status. The downfall in this, of course, is sloppy homework. Just keep in mind—quality is better than quantity.

Also, all of these theories are just that—theories. I've offered them up as possibilities for people to consider as they make their own explorations and there are merits and flaws in all of them. For more information on exploring origins, check out Chapter 9.

Not everyone settles on one pet theory. As Korak says, "As I do believe in reincarnation, I feel that it is a strong possibility for the origin of my therianthropy, though I cannot rule out other explanations. I do think that there is more to it than just reincarnation, especially for others. The bottom line is, I don't know. All my theories are just that". Similarly, Rumor says that "To be grandiose for a moment, speculating on why I am the way I am is a lot like speculating on the big bang. It

¹¹⁶ Silver Elves, 2001, p. 28

might be interesting, and marginally useful, but there's really no way to know for sure, and it doesn't impact daily life too much. I am the way I am; I don't know if there's one particular thing I can attribute it to."

I have found that there is a definite advantage in considering multiple theories of origin. Looking at something from multiple angles always gives more perspectives than only looking at it one way. Exploring that which is Other is no easy task, particularly for those who feel the need to have a full story and explanation lined up (and there's nothing wrong with that!). When you only consider one possible theory, you may be limiting the possible explanations and therefore your understanding of being Otherkin. However, if you allow for numerous possible theories, there's a lot more material to work with.

My own situation is a good example. I have had a few visions which *could* be memories from a past or alternate life I've had. I haven't had much luck in proving that they're my memories and not just something out of my imagination, though—they're pretty sparse, and aren't all in first person, as sometimes I'm watching myself from another angle. On the other hand, I've also considered the possibility that they're visions inherited from my totem, Wolf, as a way of showing me what it's like to be a wolf (since I was raised by Catholics, not wolves). Or they might be something gleaned from the Collective Unconscious, a random interpretation of archetypes and motifs downloaded during a lucid dream and integrated into my personal mythology. If I consider these options, the "memories" make more sense, and I'm not banging my head against a figurative wall in an attempt to try to squeeze more information out of a possibility that doesn't have enough evidence to give it more weight. I can explore my memories as a part of a larger fabric of memories and visions, a piece of which I hold myself. Additionally, my own personal conscious evolutionary work, and an interview with Su Fenton, a therapist, both have given me an interesting psychological view of my therianthropy which has helped me to understand some of the more mundane roots of it.

In this way I have expanded the ways I can understand and work with my therianthropy. The totemic and personal mythological aspects give me more spiritual fulfillment than the sparse reincarnation evidence, and the psychological viewpoint helps me to understand the ways that my being a wolf (nonphysically) affects my behaviors and thoughts, and what sort of conditioning may have facilitated my beliefs in the first place. This doesn't mean, of course, that I can't keep looking for more memories; I haven't entirely given up on the idea of reincarnation. And even if I do compile a more complete past life history, it doesn't make the other theories obsolete, as they still would have meaning to me and what I am. It's quite possible to understand the same phenomenon on multiple levels at once.

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This brings up the question of whether you view your being Otherkin as literal, metaphorical, or both. Some theories, such as reincarnation and genetics, are often taken very literally. In the case of the former, the person believes that s/he lived as something nonhuman in a past or alternate life, and that the memories s/he possesses are hers. In the latter, being Otherkin is tied to physical characteristics that resemble the Other, or perhaps a family legend that a long-ago ancestor wasn't quite human. Metaphorical theories, such as personal mythology, allow for more breathing room and personalization. However, they sometimes may require a more adventurous mind in a society where empirical data is valued over personal experience.

It's an individual decision as to how you view being Otherkin. Taking a very literal position tends to limit your possibilities to those that you think you can prove, but does allow some people more perceived security in that it conforms to mainstream ideals of objectivity. Being metaphorically-minded, on the other hand, can allow you to consider more possibilities without the constraint of proof; however, care must be taken to remember that metaphor is very personal, and so what is true for you may not be true for the next person, and is quite subjective.

As is probably no surprise, I err on the side of metaphor, simply because I enjoy the flexibility of mindset that it affords me. However, I also entertain the idea that perhaps this is all just a miswiring in my brain, or residual effects of a past life as a wolf. Again, I see being able to hold several theories as possible at once to be an advantage, as I can shift paradigms as I find it necessary (making me an abstract shapeshifter indeed!)

So feel free to take into consideration the theories above, in addition to whatever you may have worked with in the past. You don't have to replace what you already believe, but perhaps you'll find some new ideas and fresh perspectives on bring Otherkin.

Introduction to Types of Otherkin

Before we go bounding into the various types of Otherkin, I wanted to toss out a few points. Please keep in mind that the categories here are generalizations, not holy writ. I present examples of Otherkin, but as is evidenced by the chapters that follow, even the definitions of what a specific type of 'kin is vary among those very 'kin themselves. Identification and categorization are very individual things, and oftentimes words like "elf" or "therianthrope" are used to group together people with similar, but not necessarily the same, experiences and definitions. Otherkin cannot be explained in absolutes, only examples.

There aren't as many common threads running through different types of 'kin as one might expect, beyond the label they use to identify themselves. Take dragonkin, for example. Now, most people in the United States (which is the culture I have the most experience with), when they think of dragons, will picture a huge scaly reptilian beast with four legs, wings, and the ability to breathe fire, as well as a penchant for hoarding gold and dining on virgins. But if I tried to say that all dragons are aggressive people whose self-image more or less matches the popular depictions, I'd be doing the substantial number of dragons who are more easygoing and who see themselves differently a disservice. Nor is it accurate to say that all dragonkin believe they're reincarnated, or that they all had early Awakenings, and so forth. Even the way that different dragons describe their draconic selves differs from individual to individual. It's the same way with all types of 'kin, for the most part. There are some things that we can say are very common, such as (nonphysical) shapeshifts among therianthropes. And vampires are pretty well defined by their need to feed on either energy or blood. But for the most part being Otherkin seems to be a very personally-defined thing.

This means that your experiences may vary from others in this book. If you're a faerie, but don't agree with everything (or anything) I say about the fey, that doesn't automatically make you wrong. The sheer variance in people's responses is proof that there's no absolute right or wrong way to be 'kin. Each person has hir own path to walk, and this book is simply a resource to help people along the way. On the other hand, if something that someone says particularly resonates with you, it may open up an avenue of exploration (Just remember to keep your shaker of salt and your Occam's Razor handy.).

And again, there are those who adopt a label only because it is the entity familiar to humanity that resembles what they identify as. Often this is for simplicity of communication, as Arhuaine describes:

We are both elves, or at least we are of a race of people that closely resembles what mythology describes as elves. In some other communities we equally fit descriptions of "Starseeds", "Pleiadians" etc. It's all a matter of perspective. I don't for a minute suppose that our people ever called themselves elves. The world we came from, we've nicknamed "Alorya", so I guess you could call us "Aloryan". The term "elf" is useful as a placeholder; if I describe myself as Elf, most people will have a good idea of what that means. If I call myself "Aloryan" I have to go into a lengthy description, then they'll say "Oh! You mean like an elf!"

I have not included extraterrestrials or Starseed in this book, at least not as a group. There are a few Otherkin who believe that their previous lives were on other planets, and/or that different "planes" of existence may just be other planets in the same linear universe. There have been parallels drawn between faerie lore, particularly that involving abductions, and E.T. lore. Patrick Harpur is particularly adept at comparing these two threads of myth, and I highly recommend his writing on the subject for anyone interested. Additionally, information about Starseed may be found mixed in with information about angelkin.

Some may question my focus on traditional folklore and particularly on modern mythology such as movies, books, comics and other vehicles of pop culture. While few Otherkin take mythology and folklore 100% literally, whether ancient or modern, many take inspiration from the stories and archetypes. They resonate with certain traits that may remind them of "home", so to speak; for instance, there are elves who don't see themselves as resembling anything out of J.R.R. Tolkien's work, and may not even have used the word "elf" in their Other lives, but they sense a certain familiarity with his interpretation of elves. I've included pop culture information in regards to the types Otherkin who seem to take inspiration from it most often, though this should not be taken as an assumption that all of them do. In addition, many Otherkin enjoy mythology of varying types and times whether it involves their 'kin self or not.

The mention of roleplaying games may particularly raise eyebrows. One of the biggest accusations made against Otherkin is that we're all overactive gamers (who have no love life, are unattractive, and live in our parents' basements. Given that I'm happily married, have figure modeled professionally, and have been out of my parents' home for years, I'd say the stereotype isn't exactly accurate.). While Otherkin generally don't actually believe that they can throw fireballs or disappear before observers' eyes, some do like the stories and settings that writers

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of these games have created. The White Wolf roleplaying systems are particularly thoroughly crafted, and as long as it is kept in mind that these are not literal truth, RPGs can be as good a basis for personal mythology as anything else. On the other hand, it should not be assumed that Otherkin take these works of fiction literally. While, as discussed in Chapter 1, White Wolf RPGs were an important part in formulating the Otherkin community in the 1990s, their role was not as a literal interpretation of the Way Things Are. For example, superficially the house-based organization of some vampires, and earlier versions of the Black Veil, a set of ethics coauthored by Michelle Belanger, Father Todd, and COVICA¹¹⁷ resemble material found with *Vampire: the Masquerade*, at least aesthetically.¹¹⁸ The former examples are, however, thoroughly delineated from the latter with a little reading and research, and while these methods of community organization may have been inspired by RPGs, they should not be used as "proof" that the Otherkin subculture is nothing but a big game.

And so, without further disclaimers, on to the flavors of Otherkin!

¹¹⁷ See http://www.sanguinarius.org/articles/black_veil_2.shtml

¹¹⁸ See Rein-Hagen, Mark (1992). *Vampire: the Masquerade*. Stone Mountain, Georgia: White Wolf

Therianthropy is the modern-day haven of the weretreature, the shapeshifter, the being who is animal and human all at once. From wolves, bears, and big cats, to deer, horses, and many other animals, therians possess an innate connection to a nonhuman animal. Unlike lycanthropes of legend and lore, therians exist within human society without ever hunting rural livestock or preying upon urban pedestrians.

Classic Lycanthropy

Humans who turn into animals, animals who turn into humans, and beings who are both simultaneously, are a group whose depictions span the globe and who leave their traces across millennia. Sometimes they are wholly preternatural creatures; other times they are everyday human beings who just happen to turn into animals at various times. They may be threatening, or kind, or simply neutral. Their shifting may be an inherent part of them, or it may be caused by a curse or other magic later on in life.

One of the oldest potential shapeshifters is a curious cave painting located in Lascaux, France. This detailed figure of a strange human-animal hybrid at has inspired a number of theories about who—or what—he really is. He's a male humanoid with branching antlers, a furred body, a wolfish tail and prominent genitalia. Was he a paleolithic shaman or hunter (or both) working magic for a successful hunt? Could he be the embodiment of the Animal Master of a species of deer? Or is he an early representation of the shapeshifter, bearing traits of human and animal alike?¹¹⁹

Lopez notes that hunter-gatherer cultures may not have imitated wolves in order to learn how to hunt (he prefers the theory of convergent evolution, two groups developing the same traits simultaneously but unrelated): "Conscious *identification* with the wolf...was a mystical experience based on a penetrating perception of the wolf's lifeway, its gestalt. And it could, on occasion, become conscious imitation." The tribes tended to see themselves as just another animal, rather than superior to and separate from other creatures. "They [American Indians] thought of themselves as The People (that is the

¹¹⁹ Campbell, 1984-B, p. 292, 310

translation from the native tongue of most tribal names) and of animals as The Wolves, The Bears, The Mice, and so forth."¹²⁰

Shapeshifters are seen as distinctly supernatural beings, and for a human to emulate or become them is an act of magic, in and of itself. This often led to rituals like that of the Makah, as well as a healing ritual performed on a wounded Crow named Swan's Head. Bird Shirt, another Crow who possessed a wolf bundle containing ceremonial items, took a wolf skin from this bundle and used it to heal Swan's Head, who had been shot in the chest. By the end of the testimony, Bird Shirt had fully internalized the spirit of the wolf, and Swan's Head was healed.¹²¹

A European example is the Berserkers. Berserkers donned an animal-skin garment before battle and in this manner channeled the more ferocious aspects of that species. It's questionable whether they were considered to have physically shifted or simply achieved an intense mental shapeshift with possible physiological effects such as adrenaline release and heightened perception, though Rockwell describes the idea that the berserker's spirit left the human body to battle in bear form.¹²² While the root meaning of berserker is "bear-shirt," wolves were also popular animals to emulate.¹²³ A similar concept is what Jackson refers to as "skin-leaping". In this practice, a person practices astral projection and can affect the physical world through the non-physical animal form, particularly for the purpose of participating in battles.¹²⁴

There are plenty of tales of humans benefiting from a direct encounter with shapeshifters of nonhuman origin. The origin of the Cheyenne Wolf Soldiers illustrates how supernatural shapeshifters could intervene in human affairs for the better. A man named Owl Friend, caught in a rain storm, took shelter with a group of young men. After they imparted upon him the rituals necessary to become Wolf Soldiers, they themselves turned into wolves to bid him farewell.¹²⁵ Another well-known example is White Buffalo Calf Woman. A goddess-like figure, she changes from a woman's shape to that of a white bison calf and gives the Lakota their seven most sacred rites.¹²⁶

American indigenous stories are not the only home of relatively benign shapeshifters. In a romance dating back to the 1100s, *William of Parlerne*, a werewolf named Alphouns guards a Sicilian prince.¹²⁷ Sometimes the shapeshifter is the vulnerable one. One example is the

¹²⁰ Lopez, 1978, p. 98

¹²¹ Lopez, 1978, p. 106-108

¹²² Rockwell, 1991, p. 187

¹²³ Davidson, 1969, p. 38-40

¹²⁴ Jackson, 1995, p. 16

¹²⁵ Lopez, 1978, p. 115-117

¹²⁶ Brown, 1997, p. 71-72

¹²⁷ Lopez, 1978, p. 230

swan maiden of Sweden and other parts of Europe. She is an immortal being in bird form who, along with her sister flock, swoops down to a lake to bathe. Unbeknownst to the swans, a man watches as they remove their feathers and swim in the water. He takes up one of the skins; while the other swan maidens fly away, the unfortunate one is compelled to accompany the man, whom she eventually marries. Inevitably, though, the maiden finds her hidden feathers, dons them, and flies away. The same story occurs in Iceland, involving a seal-woman instead.¹²⁸ Marie de France wrote her *lei*, "Bisclavret," about a rather benign werewolf whose wife takes advantage of his condition.¹²⁹

The humans can be merciful, though. Gerald of Wales relates a story of a husband and wife, both cursed to be werewolves, the former of whom seeks a priest to deliver the eucharist to the latter, who is dying.¹³⁰ The Bella Coola told of a woman who delivered one wolf's pups and saved another from choking. For these deeds the wolves granted her magic. Another woman who lived among wolves after running away from her tribe displayed great power once she was taken back to the people. While these last two examples don't necessarily involve shapeshifters, they do suggest a connection between humans who identify or work with animals, and supernatural abilities.¹³¹

Much of shapeshifter lore, though, involves violent, dangerous beings. A common word for shapeshifter, "lycanthrope" stems from a combination of the Greek *lukos* (wolf) and *anthropos* (man). It shares roots with the name of Lycaeon, who ruled Arcadia with a violent hand. He was visited by Zeus, king of the Greek henotheistic pantheon, who wished to see Lycaeon's hubris for himself. The mortal received his Otherworldly visitor and watched the god remove his disguise. In order to test the validity of Zeus' claims of godhood, the king had a man (some say his own son) captured, killed, and prepared as a meal for his guest. No sooner was the grisly meat served, though, than the furious deity transformed his host into a wolf:

*His own savage nature showed in his rabid jaws, and he now directed against the flocks his innate lust for killing...he retained some traces of his original shape. The greyness of his hair was the same, his face showed the same violence, his eyes gleamed as before, and he presented the same picture of ferocity.*¹³²

¹²⁸ Yolen, 1986, p. 303-304, 310-311

¹²⁹ Marie de France, 1986, p. 68-72

¹³⁰ Steiger, 1999, p. 45

¹³¹ Lopez, 1978, 121-122

¹³² Ovid, 1967, p. 35

Much like Lycaeon, shapeshifters in world mythology are more often than not malevolent beings. Some involve entire tribes or other groups that turn into wolves. Herodotus attaches this to the Neurians in Russia; Pliny and some of his contemporaries exaggerated the actions of a wolf-cult near Rome, as well as the Anthus family of Arcadia, one of whom turned into a wolf every nine years; Olaus Magnus wrote about gothic werewolves who would break into wine cellars and get drunk, and that those of Livonia held contests to see which could jump over a certain wall. Other tales told of solitary werewolves. Petronius, in the *Satyricon*, tells possibly the earliest version of the story in which a werewolf, wounded in wolf form, displays the wound in human form as well, giving himself away. A werewolf becomes a dangerous mother-in-law to Signy, daughter of the Icelandic King Volsung.¹³³

Witches the world over are supposed to have been able to turn into various animals to work evil deeds. Medieval European witches take the forms of crows, hares, and the infamous black cat.¹³⁴ Roman writings refer to the *strix*, an owl of unearthly traits that houses the soul of a sorcerous woman.¹³⁵ African witches take the forms of snakes, bats, birds and other creatures and, like their European counterparts, burn down homes, blight crops and otherwise cause havoc for nearby communities.¹³⁶ Among the Guiana Indians, there is a certain tree favored by dangerous spirits, known as Kanaima. Its sap is said to transform people into various types of animals, either by being rubbed on the skin or thrown over the targeted person. These animals, known as Kanaima animals, are overwhelmingly malicious and may range from insects to jaguars.¹³⁷

In contrast to some of the American Indian tribes of the United States, the tribes in the Southwest held a more negative view of shapeshifters, known as skinwalkers. The ability to transform into a dog, coyote, owl, or other creature connects witches (who are closer to medieval European hags than modern-day neopagans) to skinwalkers. The Tewa say that witchcraft originated from Coyote, who marries Yellow Corn Girl and teaches her to turn into an animal by jumping through a hoop of yucca fibers. The couple then proceeds to murder some of her relatives through magical means.¹³⁸

Mai-coh, from the Navajo language, means both witch and wolf. In their tradition, witches wear wolfskins while carrying out malevolent deeds. They may poison people in their homes (if dirt falls from the roof

¹³³ Lopez, 1978, p. 205-6, 233-234

¹³⁴ Harpur, 2003, p. 224

¹³⁵ Cohn, 2000, p. 117-118

¹³⁶ Parrinder, 2000, p. 148-149

¹³⁷ Roth, 2000, p. 217

¹³⁸ Simmons, 2000, p. 206, 211

it means a skinwalker may be prowling there). Or they may steal parts of corpses and hide them near their intended target to make the angry ghost seeking its missing flesh harass the innocent. Fear of skinwalkers is prevalent enough that many refuse to talk about the subject; some still keep gall, a witch repellent, in the home at all times.¹³⁹

Malevolent American indigenous shapeshifters occur more rarely outside of the Southwest. The Lakhota deer woman, for example, is a black-tail doe who transforms into a beautiful woman to seduce a man. The meeting generally ends up fatal for the man, though the rare survivors of such an encounter often gain magical abilities.¹⁴⁰ The Ashango tribe in Africa has a similar tradition of wereleopards who hunt human prey.¹⁴¹

During the same general era as the European witch hunts (roughly the 1500s to the late 1700s), malevolent shapeshifters were once again detected within the fringes of human societies. Supposed lycanthropes were tried, tortured, and killed for crimes both real and imagined. Peter Stumpf, "the Werewolf of Bedburg", is one of the most famous cases. A German man in his mid-60's, he was accused in 1589 of crimes ranging from incest to cannibalism. Reportedly when he was captured he changed from a wolf back to a man in front of his pursuers. He died somewhere in the course of having flesh torn from his body, the severing of his limbs, and decapitation.¹⁴² People who had killed or assaulted children were often convicted and executed for being werewolves; many were burned, alive or dead.¹⁴³

Pop Culture Lycanthropy

While other wereanimals like cats, snakes, and even alligators all make appearances within movies, fictional books, and comics, it is the werewolf who has most captivated modern audiences. Hollywood's habit of drawing from folk tales (and occasionally screenwriter's innovations) has resulted in an entire body of movie conventions involving lycanthropes.

The Wolfman, starring Lon Chaney, Jr., is the father of all modern werewolf movies and the source of many of the traits attributed to film-based lycanthropes. Chaney plays Lawrence Talbot, a rather clumsy sort of fellow who is bitten by a wolf. Every full moon a pentagram shows up on his palm, and he is forced to shift. He is beaten to death with a

¹³⁹ Lopez, 1978, p. 123-124

¹⁴⁰ Brown, 1997, p. 20

¹⁴¹ Jackson, 1995, p. 141-142

¹⁴² Steiger, 1999, p. 265-268

¹⁴³ Lopez, 1978, 240-241

silver cane and reverts to human form upon death. Unlike many earlier lycanthropes, though, Talbot becomes a strange hybrid more resembling a yeti than a wolf—later movies draw on this extensively when they don't have the budget for full prosthetics.

Other traditional folkloric traits that show up spontaneously in pop culture lycanthropy are a unibrow (eyebrows that meet in the middle); either the index or ring finger being of the same length as the middle finger; and hairy palms.¹⁴⁴ If a shapeshifter is wounded while in animal form, the injury will carry over into the human form, marking them as the suspect.

Some of these myths show up in Stephen King's *Silver Bullet*, one of the first pieces of modern horror fiction to feature lycanthropy. It has since been joined by dozens of other novels in the horror, fantasy, and even science fiction genres. *Black on Black* by K.D. Wentworth is set in the future, where an anthropomorphic wolf raised by humans confronts his species as an adult. The protagonist in Kelly Armstrong's *Bitten* and *Stolen* is a female werewolf in a modern setting where all the rest of her kind are male.

A growing trend in modern fiction is to depict werewolves as benign social animals rather than vicious "lone wolves". Tanya Huff's *Blood Trail* is a superior example of this. Her lycanthropes are a pack built around blood relatives. They exhibit all ranges of animal behavior—they defend their home, yes, but they're also known to simply sit and chew on a bone. One of my favorite quirks is their love of the long, smooth vocals of opera that remind them of their own howls.

Real animals also inspired the shapeshifters of various species in Laurell K. Hamilton's Anita Blake series of books. Set in modern-day St. Louis—with the exception that the supernatural is an everyday part of life—the books features wolf, leopard, hyena, fox and other sorts of shapeshifters as regular characters. The social interactions between the werewolves struck me as particularly reminiscent of lupine pack structure and behavior. While later books in the series have become less supernatural fantasy and more erotica, earlier ones (particularly *The Killing Dance* and *Blue Moon*) illustrate this particular manifestation of modern shapeshifter fiction.

Werewolves have popped up in the world of comic books as well. Marvel published *Werewolf by Night* starting in 1972. The main character, Jack Russell, still makes occasional appearances in Marvel books. John Jameson (aka Man-Wolf), is the son of the *Daily Bugle* publisher J. Jonah Jameson in *Spider-man* titles. He gains his lycanthropic powers by way of a unique chunk of moon rock.

¹⁴⁴ Steiger, 1999, p. 85

In the past fifteen years or so, occult and mystical themes (including lycanthropy) have become more prevalent in comics as the median age of readers has shifted from adolescence to adulthood. DC's Vertigo line is most notable for this. A six-book series, *Ghost Dancing*, revolves around Plains Indian mythology; in it, both Coyote and White Buffalo Calf Woman incarnate in human form, but also revert to anthropomorphic animal shapes later in the series. A recent arrival to the scene is Jester Press' *Night*, involving crime scene mysteries and—what else?—werewolves.

The internet has spawned hundreds, if not thousands, of web comics. Two of these stand out as examples of the shapeshifter in this genre, with two very different interpretations. *Shifters*, by Marie Tary, is modern horror in a manga-influenced style.¹⁴⁵ Shapeshifters of various species are joined by vampires, elves, mages, and other denizens of the Otherworld juxtaposed into a modern city. Conversely, Jakkal's *Black Tapestries* is set in a pseudo-medieval fantasy setting. Humans share this world with kaetif, intelligent, anthropomorphic animals. Kaerwyn, the main character, shifts forms between human and fox kaetif (much to her dismay).¹⁴⁶

The wildly popular (no pun intended) *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* roleplaying game presents yet another angle on the shapeshifter. A dystopic, slightly futuristic, Earth is populated by not only werewolves but also cat, reptile, coyote, spider, and other shifters. Each species has unique tribes, laws, symbols, and lexicon, very thoroughly developed. Almost overwhelmingly the shifters are working to defend the Earth from the ravages of humanity and the corruptive spirit known as the Wyrm. While in recent years its popularity has waned, as of this writing there's still a solid core fan base.

Finally, I'd like to mention a couple examples of Japanese anime that spoke to me as a therian. One is Hayao Miyazaki's *Mononoke Hime* (*The Princess Mononoke*); the protagonist is a young girl who was raised by wolves, and while she can't turn into a wolf herself she exhibits many of the same traits. The other is the series *Wolf's Rain* created by Keiko Nobumoto. It follows the adventures of some of the last remaining wolves on Earth who disguise themselves as humans to keep from being exterminated. Both of these treat the human-wolf connection not as a matter of drooling, snarling beasts, but as a balance between the two.

¹⁴⁵ See <http://shifters.comicgen.com/>

¹⁴⁶ See <http://blacktapestries.comicgen.com/>

Modern Therianthropy

For [the bison dancers] there was an inner identity with the bison or with the bison's spirit-principle. The dancer's affirmation, that he had "a real buffalo inside him", did not represent simply a metaphorical statement for him. Such "identification" must have been the object of many of these types of animal dance-impersonations.¹⁴⁷

The word therianthrope is composed of the Greek *therios* (animal) and *anthropos* (man).¹⁴⁸ It was first used as a term to differentiate shapeshifters in legend and lore that were not lycanthropes (werewolves).¹⁴⁹ However, more recently "therianthrope" (also known as a shifter, were [insert species here], animal person) describes a person whose Other side is a natural, everyday animal. Often this bond is considered to be spiritual, though there are those who consider their therianthropy to be purely psychological, others who view it as a result of reincarnation, and a rare few who bring genetics into play. Another scarce group is those who consider themselves to be animal spirits in human bodies, some of whom even experience species dysphoria. Regardless, the person believes himself to be the animal as much as (or even more than) s/he is human. Many therianthropes experience mental, spiritual, and related shifts to the perception, behaviors, and energy of their animal(s). This particular use of the word apparently arose via the alt.horror.werewolves newsgroup late in 1994, introduced by James Herrion III as a more generalized term than lycanthropy.¹⁵⁰

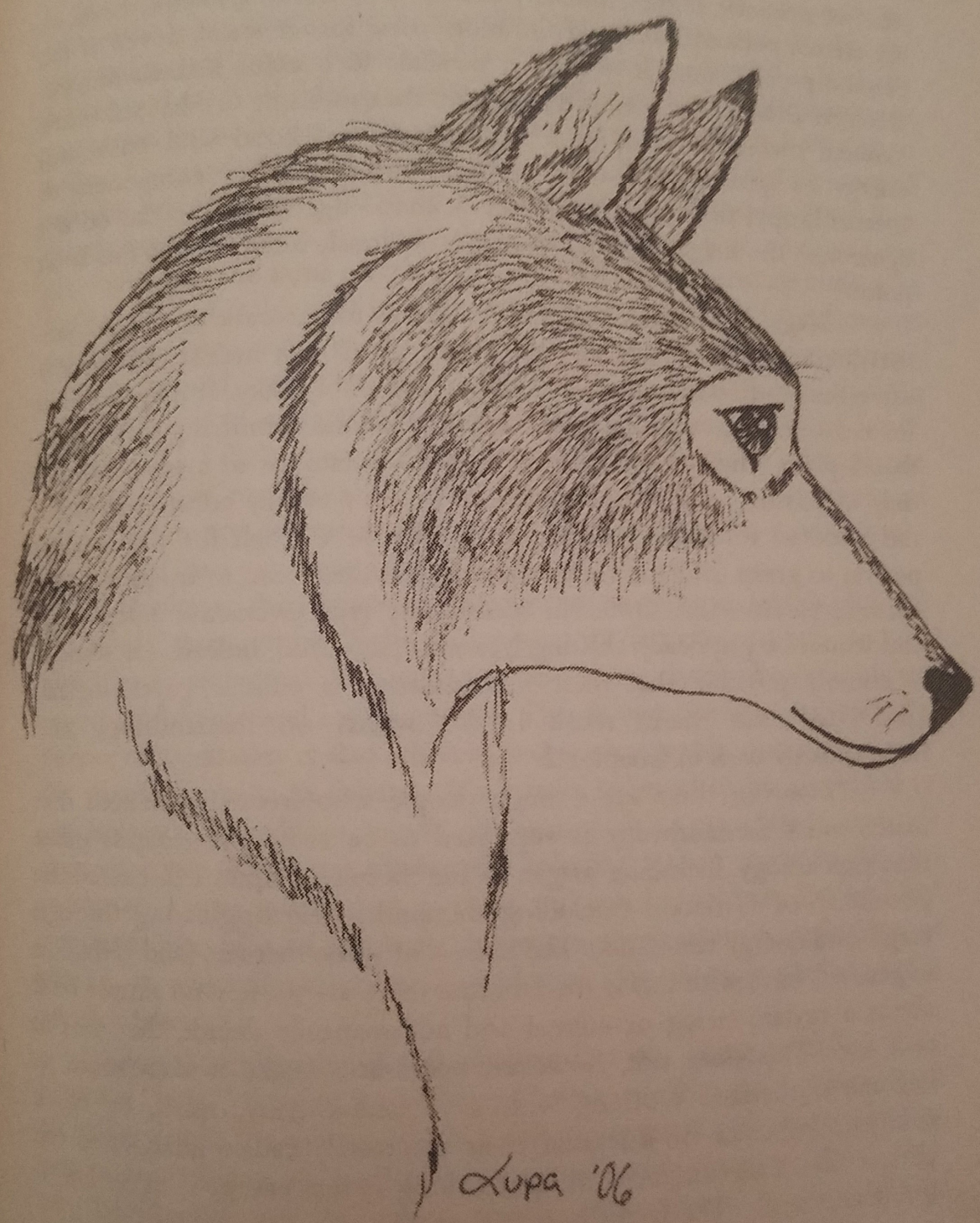
As with other types of Otherkin, being a therianthrope isn't nearly as dramatic as one might think. Many times it's not so much a matter of a person being either the human or the animal to the exclusive of the other, as it is the animal affecting the perceptions of the human. Erynn says, "I would say that sometimes I feel like I manifest certain senses derived from the animal spirits I work with--a more acute awareness of my surroundings, for instance, or an increased need for privacy and solitude. I'm usually happier interacting with people at a distance. Even when I'm in a crowd of friends, I tend to take a peripheral position and wait for people to come to me, rather than aggressively mingling."

¹⁴⁷ Brown, 1997, p. 65

¹⁴⁸ Jakkal, 2004-L

¹⁴⁹ Douglas, 1992, p. 7

¹⁵⁰ Swiftpaw, unknown



Opinions vary as to whether therianthropy is inborn from the start or whether it can be cultivated in a "normal" human being (It's debated in other groups of 'kin as well, but it is particularly controversial among some therianthropes.). A lot depends on the theory of origin one holds to. For instance, if therianthropy is caused by a strong totemic bond or by animal personification of the more basic instincts and drives of the human psyche, then it is entirely possible to become a therianthrope. Rosalyn Greene, for example, attributes therianthropy to what she terms "animal medicine"; that is, a very strong soul-bond with an animal energy or spirit. She also cites magic as being a key component of therianthropy; therians who do not acknowledge magic or who do not agree with the magical theory of origin obviously disagree with this latter point.¹⁵¹

Magic is sometimes shunted aside as too esoteric an explanation for therianthropy. That's not surprising, given that mainstream society often sees Otherkin in general as being incredibly flaky. It may be easier for most non-'kin to accept the idea of someone identifying with a tiger than a pixie. The concept of totemism is still familiar to many people, if only in passing, and while therianthropy isn't usually considered to be the same as totemism, the similarity can be enough for the average person to grasp. But for some, there is a distinct need to try to distance themselves from the Otherkin community (and overactive roleplayers, and would-be physically shifting lycanthropes). And, indeed, for some it is entirely possible that their therianthropy is entirely psychological, hard-wired into them; recall Liesk's words on therianthropy and neurobiology back in Chapter 2.

However, there are enough people who have experiences that match what therianthropy is supposed to be that claim origins other than psychology, including magic. In the theories chapter I discussed the possibility of Otherkin (including therianthropes) originating through magic and energy resonance. The issue that some therians (and Otherkin in general) have with this is the fact that there are those who simply read about a certain being or animal and automatically decide that they're one, too. This does not, however, necessarily make it impossible to become a therian. Working with a particular deity, spirit, or other energetic influence on a regular basis commonly causes changes in the personality of the magician, at least as long as that energy is in his life, if not permanently. The factor here is time.

In addition, it's possible that magic may trigger and aid Awakening. Teriel talked in his survey about how his usage of Taoist meditation to dissolve energetic and spiritual blockages may have aided him in recognizing his Fox self: "Fox was always there I think, but very

¹⁵¹ Greene, 2000, 16

subdued until over a year ago, almost as if the dissolving [a form of magical meditation] freed [it]". However, further work with magic in general helped this person come to the idea that his Bear side was more likely only an external totemic influence, rather than being inherent.

If you take an evolutionary psychological stance on therianthropy it's possible to alter your personality however you see fit. In the personality aspecting experimentation I've done I've found that both my human and my wolf sides are quite malleable if conscious effort is made to change them. In my most significant experiment which I alluded to earlier I expanded my therian "self", so to speak, to include several animals besides Wolf. While it was a temporary situation done in a drastic manner over a relatively short period of time, it speaks of the possibility that the same effects may be achieved permanently if done in a more gradual fashion. It has been argued that someone's fundamental psyche and personality cannot be changed; however, if that were true, then we would never change at all from one year to the next. In addition, a bit of research into Robert Anton Wilson, Timothy Leary, and John C. Lilly's metaprogramming, among others, all demonstrate that conscious evolution is quite possible. In addition, the theory of energy resonance demonstrates another manner in which a person may be changed on a very deep level.

However, there is strong resistance among some to the idea that the word "therianthropy" should be used to describe just anyone who identifies as an animal. For this particular camp, therianthropy is always inborn and hardwired into a person. This is very similar to those who believe that sexuality is also inherent and unchangeable, and occasionally the parallel is made in debates. It's usually believed to be a spiritual or psychological condition, and sometimes it's postulated that all therianthropes have some similar psychological trait in common that is a matter of nature rather than nurture and can be neither obtained nor removed. The idea of someone *becoming* a therianthrope, regardless of means, is generally discounted, and the idea is pigeonholed under another label.

For the purposes of this chapter I'm not going to differentiate between "born" therians and "created" therians. The main point I want to make is that the animal-self is a fully integrated part of the therian, not an outer being, external totem, or roleplaying character. It is a part of the therian or, in other words, the therian is the animal (nonphysically).

Most therians, as is common among 'kin in general, don't have an abrupt Awakening. In fact, among those I surveyed the majority reported something along the lines of "Well, the connection was always there. I just didn't know what to call it until..." For many, the awareness of the animal self begins in childhood. Young therians, not always

burdened down by societal pressures, often act "inappropriately". They may make noises like their animal, crawl around on all fours, eat food without using their hands, and so forth, because these behaviors make total sense to them. Even once they're discouraged they still have a tendency to "act oddly". Some repress the animal side for years, until the pressure builds up too much, or they discover other therians who make them feel like they're no longer alone. Illanou is a good example of this pattern:

Wolf has been an aspect of my life for as long as I can remember, my earliest memories being from the age of two. At that age I was known to claim myself a 'den' in the space beneath various furniture items, such as the dining room table belonging to my friend's grandmother, which I would protect by growling at passers-by. As I grew older, I retained the wolfish aspect of myself, often playing childhood games in which I was a dog or wolf. I also spent quite a bit of time with the family dog, playing with her as another dog would. Sometimes I was even known to howl, growl, and move about on all fours. It wasn't until I was fourteen that I began suppressing my wolfish urges in an attempt to fit in at school, as I was experiencing quite a bit of social trouble at the time. Despite the fact my wolf-side had become less apparent, I still retained a certain feral aspect which, more often than not, manifested itself as aggression. Mental shifts were still relatively common. My severe anxiety and the stress of social situations lead me to suppress my wolf-self quite a bit by the time I was sixteen. It wasn't until this summer that I began to rediscover myself, and I am slowly returning to my 'true self'. I suppose you could call it a sort of second awakening, the first having occurred in childhood without my knowing it.

Therians, however, are not just beastly-minded people who shy away from humanity. Generally speaking, they're quite well adjusted to living in human society, though not all may be comfortable there. Many feel out of place, or different, even as children. Some therians report that animals, children, and/or sensitive adults notice their differences. Tygermoon Foxx remarks on Simtra:

People do notice something different about him. Babies really like looking at him and younger children who can speak have labeled him 'fox' or 'wolfie' or 'doggie' without a visual cue such as his amulet or belt buckle. I think the Japanese place where we like to eat has always known. We have a tradition of eating there on his birthday and for the last two years we've gone in wearing our ears and tails [costumes]. They greeted him just like ... a fox spirit and when I saw this I realized that they ALWAYS greeted him that way.

The Animal Self

Phenotype, wereside, theriotype, and animal mind, are all alternate terms for the part of a therianthrope that identifies as an animal.¹⁵² There's no single explanation for the presence of the animal self. Some connect it to a past life as a certain animal. Others explain it as the more primitive circuits in the brain expressing themselves in animal form. Another psychological model cites early imprinting, to include identifying with a favorite animal or with a beloved pet. Animal totems may also have a role in this by way of creating a very strong internal connection with the therian. However, there are therians whose totems differ from their animal sides, as well as those who do not work with totems at all. A very rare number cite genetics, either therianthropy itself as an inherited condition, or a legendary animal ancestor from way back in the family tree. Then there is those who chalk their condition up to a mental disorder—albeit one that allows for social functionality.

Generally speaking, therianthropy involves connection to “natural” animals, those that are native to the physical plane of existence. They may be species that are currently alive, or extinct species. People who are kin to dragons, gryphons, and other “fantastic” animals, as well as kitsune, are dealt with in Chapter 7. Some therians are also other types of ‘kin, but therianthropy itself involves animals of Earth.

Some therians have a very solid idea of what their animal side looks like, down to exact color and subspecies. Illanou describes herself as “a grey wolf therianthrope, my wolf-self being of the usual size and build for the species with a mostly white, saddle-back coat.” Tygermoon sees her feline self as “I manifest as a large tawny cat or as a bengal tiger with faded rust coloration and unusual striping. There is, as I mentioned, a hybrid form which combines somewhat awkwardly the big cat and human features. It doesn't stand completely upright and talking is difficult.” Nightsong is incredibly precise about her wolf side: “Canis Lupus Ligoni (Alexander Archipelago Wolf), from a small island south of Alaska. Small wolf with dark charcoal grey fur fading to a silver underneath.”

Some therians start out believing they are one animal, but later figure out they're something different. For example, a person may initially identify as a timber wolf because they feel generally canine (but not domestic) and so the first animal they think of are timber wolves. With more introspection, though, s/he may find that she resonates more with a different canid, such as a fox or coyote. A few therians even end up misidentifying themselves by a mile, mistaking themselves for wolves when they may actually be big cats, bears, or even rabbits!

¹⁵² Jakkal, 2004-K

It's debatable why some animals are more commonly found among therians than others. Wolves are, without a doubt, the most common, with foxes and big cats coming in a close second (There's a similar phenomenon in animal totemism.). Some (snidely) say that people just want to be big, impressive animals. Others reason that we identify best with animals we can observe the most. Still, there are enough small-animal therians to add variety—rabbits, mice, squirrels, and at least one earwig.

Wolves are by far the most common phenotype—of the 35 therians who answered the survey, 14 identified as some species of wolf (you can add me in for ten). The next most populous group was felines, with a total count of 8. 3 foxes made up the third group, and there were a pair of bears and 2 unidentified canines. The rest included, among others, a hawk, a badger, a mouse, and an anaconda! Again, the high occurrence of wolves may be because of cultural conditioning.

While most therians have only one animal side, multiple animals are not unheard-of. There is also the concept of cladotherianthropy, connection to an entire family of animals as opposed to a single species.¹⁵³ A cladotherian may identify with all canines, rather than just wolf, or all feline instead of only panther. Additionally, cladotherianthropy may also spill over into fantastic animals; Balthazar, a therianthrope who has several avian aspects, also identifies as a gryphon, and Padfoot considers her ying lung dragon self to be a “therioside” along with her maned wolf self. Saydee is a bird therian, but it sometimes manifests as a gryphon or sphinx.

There is some debate as to whether therianthropy should be limited only to those who identify as animals native to this plane of existence. I have spoken to a number of dragons in particular who refer to themselves as therianthropes. However, some therians are vehement that these belong in the “Otherkin” category, separate from therianthropy altogether.

As for the physical body, therians generally don't have any major internal physiological differences from humans. While some may crave the food preferred by their animal, they won't suffer without it, or by eating something their animal wouldn't. The body is still *Homo sapiens* and requires the nutrition that that species needs. Some claim that they become ill if they don't eat a specific diet, but that may be due to internal body chemistry that occurs in certain humans anyway, with no correlation to therianthropy. Or it may be a psychosomatic reaction, in which the therian has convinced himself s/he must have a certain diet. Until someone does a study on common health issues among therians,

there should not be any assumption that a physiological abnormality "proves" therianthropy.

The majority of therianthropes also have no allergic or other reaction to silver. I myself am quite fond of it, particularly as my matron goddess is Artemis, to whom silver and wolves are both sacred. Again, any reaction to silver should probably be attributed to the same causes as food reactions, given that very few therians report any reaction to silver. Or they may be entirely psychosomatic.

In fact, none of the old tales regarding lycanthropes applies to therians. Some pagan therians may revere deities associated with the moon, and for a few there may be a subconscious connection between moonlight and shifting, but there's no real correlation between lunar cycles and shifting for therianthropy as a whole. Odd finger lengths, strange patches of hair, and pointed canines are all traits that show up in ordinary humans and sporadically in therians. There really are no physical traits that hold true for a majority or even a significant minority of therianthropes. And I've yet to hear of anyone, therian or otherwise, who exhibited strange marks (pentagrams or otherwise) appearing on their body at the full moon. If you run into someone who claims such things, ask to see evidence. Chances are their stigmata are either self-inflicted wounds or Sharpie™ ink.

There are a few people who call themselves "lycans" or "lycanthropes" and say they aren't therianthropes. They claim to have the allergy to silver and the lunar susceptibility. A few even make the bold claim of being able to physically shapeshift. These people generally tend to be discounted fairly quickly, particularly if they make the shifting claim, regardless of how sincere and mature they may be. Not surprisingly, the number of lycans rose substantially after the movie *Underworld* came out, in which the werewolves in a modern setting were known as lycans.¹⁵⁴ However, the psychosis involved with clinical lycanthropy isn't present in this particular slice of society, and so we're left with the options that either these are therians who are trying to separate themselves from the rest of the pack, as it were, a very small minority of Otherkin who've been hiding among therians, or really big fans of *Underworld*.

However, some people who would otherwise be called therianthropes sometimes choose to use other terms, including lycanthrope. They may also refer to themselves as weres, were (insert animal name here), shapeshifters, shifters, animal people or another term besides therianthrope.

¹⁵⁴ Just for the record, for those who have seen this movie, there's no long-running animosity between vampires and therians. Pure Hollywood is all that is.

Shifting

Once I can remember...a dream shift in which I was a white fox ...and then I saw some people and shifted back to human. The most vivid thing I remember is "looking" down and seeing my hands and feet still paws with all that white fur along the lower half of my arms and legs, and knowing I still had a tail and more fur going along my back, but the rest of me was human. – Fox Blackmane

Most therianthropes do shift at least on occasion. Like the berserkers and bison dancers mentioned earlier, the shifting is primarily on nonphysical levels, though mild changes to the physiology and senses are occasionally reported.

Shifting is one answer to the need to express the animal side while in a human body. Many therians sometimes feel their body is too clumsy, or awkward, or not strong or fast enough. As Swift puts it, "The only discomfort with this body is that it doesn't run faster or jump higher, and that training it takes so many hours every day. I tend to agree that, had I not been born a jaguar, I wouldn't be a Marine." A shift allows, at least through perception, the experience of having that faster, stronger, more streamlined body. It also allows, mentally, the animal side to express itself, for repression of any aspect of the self is unhealthy and eventually leads to it boiling over at inopportune moments.

Some people, particularly in online communities, have gone to great lengths to categorize the various types of shifts. Shifters.org (which was actually located at <http://www.therianthropy.org> as of my research) lists the following types of shift (along with numerous others), with a few of my own interjections from Greene's work:

Astral: an astral projection in which the astral form becomes that of the animal, with little to no noticeable change to the physical form.

Auric: a shift of the aura to animal form or energy which may result in at least a partial mental shift.¹⁵⁵

Bilocation: similar to relocation, except the spirit of the therian manifests fully on the physical plane. This type of shift is considered to be about as realistically possible as the physical shift.¹⁵⁶

Cameo: a shift in which the therian becomes an animal other than their own.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Jakkal, 2004-D

¹⁵⁶ Jakkal, 2004-E

Etheric: a shift of the etheric body. Greene postulates that therians actually have two superimposed etheric bodies, one human and one animal.¹⁵⁸

Mental: one's mindset changing from that of a human to that of the animal side, partially or, more rarely, completely¹⁵⁹; can involve symptoms affecting the body, such as changes in vocalizations and adopting more animal movements and behaviors. May also refer to any shift besides bilocation or physical.¹⁶⁰

Personality: the therian remains essentially human but the animal-self affects behavior; for example, a normally gregarious cat therian deferring to the cat-self's more solitary nature in a social setting.

Phantom: involves phantom limbs, i.e. the distinct sense of possessing parts of the body that aren't there physically such as a tail, animal ears, etc. Greene connects this to the etheric body.¹⁶¹

Physical: involves the therian's earthly body shifting partially or completely to that of the animal side. This is considered to be highly improbable in reality.¹⁶²

Possession: involves the spirit/perception of the therian entering into the mind of an actual animal and seeing through that animal's eyes. Greene recommends using a familiar animal (in the magical sense) for possession shifting.¹⁶³

Relocation: similar to astral, except the spirit rather than the astral form departs the body and may manifest visually on the physical plane with limited ability to affect it.¹⁶⁴

Sensory: does not actually affect the physical senses, but instead increases perception of them. For example, rather than relying primarily on sight as humans are wont to do, the therian would also pay close attention to sounds, scents and touch. The actual physical senses are not affected; it is merely that the therianthrope pays closer attention to them.

¹⁵⁸ Greene, 2000, p. 37

¹⁵⁹ Jakkal, 2004-G

¹⁶⁰ Greene, 2000, p. 23

¹⁶¹ Greene, 2000, 10, 17

¹⁶² Jakkal, 2004-H

¹⁶³ Greene, 2000, 34, 53-59

¹⁶⁴ Jakkal, 2004-I

Shadow: involves an illusory shift wherein the actual body does not change but the appearance does; usually occurs in poor lighting.¹⁶⁵

Some of these seem to have only slight differences from others, mainly dependent on how an individual believes the nonphysical body is defined and organized. For example, "etheric", "astral", "spiritual" and "auric" may be fully interchangeable depending on who you ask. Both "personality" and "sensory" shifts may simply be categorized as "mental" shifts by others. In addition, there is the possibility that cameo shifting may be the appearance of a new animal self, if you believe that therianthropy is more flexible. Or, for that matter, the cameo shift may be linked to totemism; I have shifted to most of the totems I work with in a regular basis, though I only count myself as a wolf therian.

Some therians prefer to keep the categorization to a minimum, often sticking with something simple, like physical, mental, and spiritual shifts. There may be some crossover among these three. Minor physical changes (or the perception thereof), such as shifts in eye color or a slight change in dental structure, sometimes accompany deep mental or spiritual shifts. Heavier mental or spiritual shifts may also cause physical movement and vocalization to become more animalistic, and the center of gravity may change. Many shifters experience mental and spiritual shifts at the same time.

Greene supports the idea of physical and bilocation shifting. She ties bilocation shifting to a lot of the theories found in spiritualism, particularly mediumship, and she lists a number of symptoms that are supposedly signs that a physical shift is imminent, though no hard evidence for either.¹⁶⁶ For the most part, though, it's generally thought that these are impossible. Until someone can prove, with a documented case, that either of these can occur, most people remain unconvinced.

Shifts can occur through conscious effort. One example is performing a shapeshifting ritual, such as invoking a totem animal. At pagan gatherings I sometimes dance in a full timber wolf skin as a part of my magical practice; this invariably brings on a strong mental shift. Others can "call on" their animal selves to bring them to the surface without any special ritual. Some therians also find that simply being out in the woods or other wild places brings on a shift. A few therians can even shift easier after reading a book or watching a nature documentary about their animals.

Shifts may be involuntarily triggered as well. A significant number of therians report that extreme emotions, particularly anger, grief, or fear, have caused mental shifts. Low blood sugar can also cause a shift.

¹⁶⁵ Jakkal, 2004-J

¹⁶⁶ Greene, 2000, p. 87-132

For example, I'm hypoglycemic. If I go for too long without food, my blood sugar crashes. At that point the Wolf part of me takes over and my primary focus is the procurement of food. While I seek out perfectly acceptable human food (usually heavy on the protein) I do get more snappish and aggressive if I don't eat right away. While the Human part of me tends to say "Be patient, food will come," the Wolf won't listen and snarls "Food! Now!"

Most therians tend to stick with their own animals when shifting; a few, however, do experience the cameo shift mentioned above. It may happen accidentally, often in dreams or guided meditations. It can be done deliberately, too, through magical invocation. For instance, I practice magic on a regular basis. I briefly invoke, to the point of a spiritual shift, each of the animals that represent the four quarters when I prepare my ritual area. If I evoke a totemic spirit into my circle to ask for help, I allow hir to use my body as a conduit. Sometimes I'll fully invoke the spirit when the time comes to actually work the magic so that the totem can use my body to focus hir own contribution. In this way I've shifted to all sorts of animals, from Horse to Deer to Beaver and many more, though I always revert back to Wolf in the end.

Greene assumes that all shifters become what she terms "integrated shifters", that is, people who have complete control over their animal sides. Non-integrated shifters see their animal sides as separate beings and have a lot less control over their animals. While integrated shifters are entirely lucid during their shifts, non-integrated shifters may experience lapses in memory, and awareness during shifts is rather fuzzy.¹⁶⁷ Most of the survey respondents, as well as most of the therians I've spoken to personally, seem to have a pretty good connection between the human and animal; nobody reported any sort of loss of control or blackouts.

Some therians exhibit certain types of shifts or animal traits on a more or less constant basis. Phantom limbs are fairly common; I tend to have a tail, ears, muzzle, paws, and fur most of the time. The movement and body language of some shifters may resemble that of their animal, even in subtle ways; for instance, I've walked on the balls of my feet since I had the balance to do so. Awareness of the senses, or the actual senses themselves, may be permanently heightened (though some argue that it's only the awareness that is capable of being beyond normal human tendencies). Instincts (related to the perception shift mentioned above) tend to be used more consistently in therians than in the general population. It's not uncommon for a therian to report being uncomfortable in crowds and cities, to feel trapped in unfamiliar situations, or to express a desire to be in hir natural habitat. However,

¹⁶⁷ Greene, 2000, p. 26-27

those who exhibit these constant mild shifts or traits may still shift temporarily and more dramatically in other manners.

For many therians, the balance between human and animal is more or less constant and so shifting doesn't occur. While other shifters may slide back and forth along the human-animal continuum, these people view the world from both the human and the animal perspectives simultaneously. This is what is defined as contherianthropy.¹⁶⁸

Beyond the terms and the facts, though, there is a spirit to shifting, to changing one's perception in some way to that of an animal that is difficult to put into words. Meiryra explains her experience very eloquently:

Let me tell you about bird. About feathers itching beneath skin, rustling atop skin, beak replacing nose-mouth-teeth, scale-crust legs. Let me share flight, soaring. Hunting, diving, watching. Always watching. Let me tell you of the shift, the change...[There] are the bad shifts, the panicky shifts. Of sudden claustrophobia where human has no problem with it, or the choice between fight-or-flight, too often turning to flight because bird is not a fighter, only a hunter, and the prize here is not high enough, not valuable enough, or there is no prize; it's not my territory. But corner me, or go after what I consider mine - friends, possessions sometimes but usually people - and fight wins out, and claws spread. Bird is territorial, possessive: "this is mine, this will not be taken, this is mine!" But there are good shifts too. Out in forest, cliffside, ridgetop, seventh floor balcony: the wind rustles in hair-feathers-wings, pushing up, so easy to spread wings and reach out, jump out, soar; so hard to resist, sometimes, as the sky calls and the longing that is rooted in human because only human can long thus, but it's inspired by bird and flight-memory, the longing aches as deep as the drop below. Or at ritual, the energy workings drawing bird out to see, experience, be - and those are the best of all, full contentment, settled with chestfeathers fluffed, watching still but this time without wariness or predatory interest; just being. Contentment, so rare, so precious.

What Therianthropy Isn't

Therianthropy does have some crossover with the furry community, but the two are not the same. Furies are people who are fans of anthropomorphic animals (think Bugs Bunny or the animals from Disney's *Robin Hood*). Many of them create personas (or, as some like to put it, "fursionas")—characters that are anthro animals that they then pretend to be, either at home or at furry conventions and other such events. They may wear something as simple as a fake tail (many furies eschew real fur) or as elaborate as a full-body fursuit (contrary to

detractors' stereotypes, the majority of furies are not into fursuit sex or furry porn, aka "yiff").

Furies differ from therians in several ways. Generally speaking, therians view their animal sides as natural animals, not anthropomorphized ones. Therians do not take off their animal selves at the end of a convention—they are human and animal at all times. Therians see their animal sides as integrated parts of themselves; they do not give their animal selves separate names or think of them as anything separate from themselves. However, these are generalizations, with exceptions to the rules on both sides of the game. In addition, as stated previously, some therians are furies and vice versa. However, the two should not be seen as one and the same. In fact, some furies see therianthropes as people who take the fandom way too seriously.

Therianthropy isn't any other sort of roleplaying game, either. Many cringe at the mention of *Werewolf: the Apocalypse*, although some are avid gamers who enjoy the creations of White Wolf. While some may admire the structure of the game, therians don't believe there are actual packs of eco-militant werewolves ready to swoop down and take them away upon puberty and teach them to physically shift. There are enough people who are a bit overzealous in their live-action roleplay, though, that some online therian communities have strict policies that require newcomers to show they're more serious about their therianthropy.

Finally (and this probably shouldn't have to be said) therianthropy has nothing to do with bestiality. While I didn't specifically poll people on the subject, I have had interactions, both in person and online, with dozens, if not hundreds, of therianthropes. Not a single one ever expressed any sexual attraction towards anything except humans, in discussions about therianthropy and sexuality. Some have said that their animal traits may become more pronounced during sex, but the attraction is still for humans. This doesn't mean that crossover can't happen, but this is a case where there should be no confusion. The vast majority of therians are appalled by animal abuse, bestiality included.

Chapter 4: Vampires

Contrary to popular depictions of the undead, modern vampires are quite alive and well. While not all vampires include themselves in the definition of Otherkin (and there are Otherkin who exclude vampires) I've included them in this book as they do not identify as wholly human. While genetically they are human (as with Otherkin in general), they are defined by their need to feed on energy in its pure form or through blood. As with therianthropes, though, the reality of today's vampires is quite different from ancient and modern mythology.

vampire lore

The darkly beautiful vampire so familiar today is a relatively recent development. Prior to the 19th century vampires tended to be anything but attractive, resembling *Nosferatu* more than *Dracula*. Even the seductive succubus was often depicted with owl's feet—probably not a common turn-on.¹⁶⁹ Early European vampires, according to Nigel Jackson,

...can be divided into two broad classes, which often overlap in folklore:

1. *The night-flying predatory ghost of the dead or entranced wizard or witch, a wholly non-material and psychic manifestation or hostile wraith who attacks and threatens the life-force of the community...*
2. *The walking corpse or revenant of one who has led an evil life which, refusing to rest in the grave, returns with aggressive intent to the world of the living. Such cadavers were sometimes raised and sent forth to do the bidding of malign sorcerers in old accounts.*¹⁷⁰

These predatory vampires were found in folklore across Europe; unlike shapeshifters, which were seen in a sympathetic light under some circumstances, vampires were universally feared and maligned.

Bulgarian vampires were supposedly created when the soul of the deceased lost access to the afterlife. This could occur because of any of a

¹⁶⁹ Koltuv PhD, 1986, p. 41

¹⁷⁰ Jackson, 1995, p. 2

number of mishandlings of the body during preparation and burial. Even a perfect funerary procession might still result in a vampire.¹⁷¹

In Eastern Europe vampire lore blends with witchcraft and lycanthropy. In a number of regional tongues the words for vampire and werewolf are one and the same. The Romanian Varcolac exemplifies this, for the creature was said to dwell within the grave and feed upon the blood of the living, but do so while in a lupine form.¹⁷² The shifting into an animal form to cause harm to others is also included in *maleficium*, witchcraft designed to cause distress to others. This trait is shared with the the bruja of Spain and Mexico, and the bruxa of Portugal, witches who fed on the blood of infants were both malevolent witches.¹⁷³ There's even occasional blending with elves. The German Alp displays a lot of vampiric tendencies, drinking the blood of innocents at night. Its name, however, derives from the same root word as Alf/Elf, and so it can safely be theorized that etymological connections reflect the broader understanding of such entities.¹⁷⁴

In Africa, vampires and malevolent witches were again closely linked. Like their European counterparts, African vampires could turn into animals, and while they fed on blood some of them could also devour certain internal organs.¹⁷⁵ Vampires in China, known as *chiang-shih*, shared some traits with European vampires, such as shapeshifting, but had unique qualities as well. They derived from bodies in which the lesser soul, or *p'ai*, did not deteriorate at death but instead reanimated the corpse, which often had been left unburied—a parallel to Bulgarian vampires in the origin of an improperly handled corpse.¹⁷⁶ The Greek lamiai were hideous female shapeshifters who fed on children's blood.¹⁷⁷

While traditionally vampires were usually thought to feed on blood, cases of psychic/energetic vampirism were also reported. Some of the Berberlangs of the Philippines were thought to astrally project at night and feed on a victim until the hapless person was found dead the next morning. A case of a baby that had died of suffocation was blamed on a Portuguese bruxa who had come in the form of a sparrow and sucked the life out of it. Vampires in Czechoslovakia frequently psychically attacked their victims.¹⁷⁸

Possibly the best-known psychic vampires of legend were the incubi and succubi, spirits that would energetically and sexually prey on

¹⁷¹ Melton, 1999, p. 78

¹⁷² Jackson, 1995, p. 80-82

¹⁷³ Melton, 1999, p. 71-73

¹⁷⁴ Jackson, 1995, p. 55-56

¹⁷⁵ Melton, 1999, p. 4-7

¹⁷⁶ Melton, 1999, p. 114-116

¹⁷⁷ Melton, 1999, p. 304

¹⁷⁸ Melton, 1999, p. 34-39, 72-73, 164-166

human victims. Some of the earliest versions of succubus lore stem from obscure Judaic lore involving Lilith. Supposedly Adam's first wife, she was cast out of Eden for merely insisting on using the woman-on-top missionary position during sex.¹⁷⁹ It is from her that succubi were first supposed to spring, which isn't surprising given her reputation as a dangerous seductress whose children feed on blood.¹⁸⁰ Succubi were accused of everything from night terror (in which a sleeper awakes and find himself unable to move in the presence of *something*) to erotic visitations involving mortal men (often used to excuse nocturnal emissions and wet dreams). Incubi were the male version of succubi, supposedly responsible for ravishing women in their sleep.¹⁸¹

Kitsune also have a bit of a vampiric heritage, including good bit of similarity with the incubus/succubus legends, as kitsune would often take the forms of beautiful women to seduce their victims. The menu, as it were, could be rather varied: "Kitsune have been known to feed off of many things, including words, knowledge, writing, music, the land, and the people around them".¹⁸² A Korean version of the kitsune, the kumiho, fed on blood.¹⁸³

Occasionally vampires were thought to have successfully crossbred with humans, usually women. The child that was born was almost always male and often was compelled to hunt down full vampires. The dhampir possessed a particularly flexible body, often thought to be boneless. He usually made a living from exterminating vampires as a way of exercising his inborn compulsion.¹⁸⁴

There are a few historical figures commonly associated with vampirism. Elizabeth Bathory was a noblewoman who reportedly bathed in human blood to retain her youth, though this piece of lore didn't arise until a century after she had died.¹⁸⁵ It is known that she was quite fond of torturing people, much like Vlad the Impaler, who is more well-known for his wide range of cruelty. It is Vlad, of course, nicknamed Dracula by his enemies, who inspired Bram Stoker's novel of the same name, the catalyst for a large portion of the modern popular culture surrounding vampires.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁹ Koltuv PhD, 1986, 19

¹⁸⁰ Jackson, 1995, p. 50-51

¹⁸¹ Melton, 1999, p. 360-361

¹⁸² LaHaise, 1997

¹⁸³ La Shure, 2001

¹⁸⁴ Jackson, 1995, p. 59

¹⁸⁵ Melton, 1999, p. 34-39

¹⁸⁶ Melton, 1999

vampires in Pop Culture

Vampires pervade popular culture; their depictions, however, are of relatively recent origin. It has been primarily the work of movies, books, and other media that have transformed the vampire from a parasitic monster to a lovely predator. Even the subculture that modern vampires themselves have created is influenced to an extent by pop culture imagery.

Jackson traces the beginning of the modern vampire archetype to *Castle of Otranto* by Walpole, dating from 1765. While this story didn't feature a vampire, it is considered to be the origin of gothic literature. At the time the tale was told, there was an "artistic upsurge from the depths of the collective unconscious [which] constituted a formidable popular rebellion against the fashionable reductionist thought of the day." Rationalism mirrored the vampire in that it sucked the life out of speculation and imagination and left it dry. A backlash of romantic writing provided readers with, among other motifs, a budding collection of vampiric fiction. Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, Polidori's *The Vampyre*, and the anonymously written *The Mysterious Stranger*, all preceded the most famous classic vampire novel, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.¹⁸⁷

The best-known image of the vampire today owes a lot to the 1931 movie, *Dracula*. Based on Stoker's novel, the movie is one of the most famous American horror movies and one of the films that touched off the monster movie craze in the 1940's and 1950's. Bela Lugosi's portrayal of Dracula has spawned a number of imitators, both serious and spoof.

Vampires have always been popular movie subjects. From *The Lost Boys* to *Innocent Blood*, *Blacula* to *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (in which Dracula plays a part), vampires are the most common movie monster. A few of the films even pit vampires against werewolves in a supposedly deep-seated rivalry; a recent example of this is *Underworld*.

Quite possibly one of the most popular modern vampire portrayals stem from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The original movie featured a Valley-Girl-turned-vampire-huntress chosen to fight against the fanged villains. More comedy than horror, the film is an amusing dash into an alternate reality (I'm particularly fond of Paul Reuben's death scene, corny though it may be). The movie spawned a wildly popular TV series, which had its own spinoff, *Angel*, both of which had vampires on both sides of the game.

Buffy and *Angel*, of course, weren't the first forays into television vampires. *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family* both featured vampire or vampire-like characters in a comic light. *Dark Shadows* was a unique

¹⁸⁷ Jackson, 1995, p. 5-6

horror soap opera in the 1960s and early 1970s, something never quite achieved by later attempts such as *Passions*, which throws metaphysical and horror elements to add sensationalism to an otherwise average soap. *Dark Shadows* was resurrected for a time in the early 1990's. Vampires became popular on prime time later in the decade with *Forever Knight*, and *Kindred: the Embraced*, the latter of which was based on the roleplaying game, *Vampire the Masquerade*.

Japanese anime features several popular vampire movies or series. Probably the best-known are the two *Vampire Hunter D* movies about a dhampir who works to protect humans from the ravages of vampires. *Vampires Princess Miyu* is more sympathetic towards vampires, the main character being one herself.

While *Dracula* set the foundations for vampires as sexy stalkers in the night, it was the writings of Anne Rice that really set the pace. Her vampires are moody, dramatic characters that helped to spark the vampire lifestyle. Other writers have further popularized vampires. P.N. Elrod's vampire detective novels and the *I, Strahd* books based on the Ravenloft roleplaying game are well-known. Laurell K. Hamilton's books started out as horror/mystery hybrids, but in recent years have become laced heavily with vampiric erotica. And Poppy Z. Brite entered the genre of horror fiction with her novel, *Lost Souls*. Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* is considered a classic, as are Brian Lumley's vampire novels.

Vampires show up in comic books as well. *Vampirella*, probably one of the best-known comic books featuring vampires, is also the longest-running, begun in 1969. Marvel Comics introduced Baron Blood in the mid-1970s, a character who had been turned into a vampire by none other than Dracula himself. One of the most popular recent comic books vampires—or, in this case, vampire hybrid—is Blade, also from Marvel, who hunts rather than allies himself with vampires. Many more are familiar with him from the movies that were made based on the comics. Vampires make frequent appearances in Jim Balent's *Tarot: Witch of the Black Rose* and other titles from Broadsword Comics. Vampires also show up in web-based comics; *Shifters* is a good example.

The vampire mystique spiked again with the publication of the roleplaying game, *Vampire: the Masquerade*. Prior to this, vampires in RPGs were most limited to being adversaries, as in *Dungeons and Dragons*, particularly the *Ravenloft* module. But in *Vampire*, as members of a variety of clans, players could weave together a net of intrigue, romance and storytelling and bring the vampire-as-roleplaying-character into a much fuller role. Along with *Werewolf: the Apocalypse* it is one of White Wolf's most successful games.

There are many, many other pop culture references to vampires; these are just a tiny sampling thereof. From the gothic to the comedic, vampires are a mainstay of modern horror.

Generally vampires are divided up into two groups—sanguine vampires that feed on blood straight from a human donor, and psychic vampires, who feed on pure energy from a variety of sources.

Sanguine vampires are closer to what the popular image of a vampire is. They need blood in order to maintain their health, and some exhibit some of the classic vampiric traits (though this isn't accepted as proof across the board, as will be explained in a bit.). While a psychic vampire is certainly physically able to drink blood, and some may be able to gain energy that way, sanguine vamps require blood to replenish their energy. Raven Kaldera, in *The Ethical Psychic Vampire*, explains that sanguine vampires are actually psychic vampires who process energy best through blood. While generally this is human blood, some vampires may be able to absorb energy through animal blood. Kaldera particularly emphasizes the ethical retrieval of such blood.¹⁸⁸

However, it may be possible for some sanguine vampires to learn to feed without blood. Mora, for example, stopped drinking blood once she learned how to bring her need for energy to a manageable point using techniques from *The Psychic Vampire Codex*. "I think that was when I hit my full dawn and began to harness and control the need for energy and stopped drinking blood...I then moved on to experimenting with the techniques and tweaking them to my own particular needs". Since the blood itself goes through the body more or less undigested, it's pretty apparent that the benefit is from the energy itself, and so the blood itself may not even be necessary beyond aesthetic purposes.¹⁸⁹

Psychic vampires feed primarily on pure energy. Belanger explains that specifically what is needed is what she terms "human vital energy".¹⁹⁰ While a few psychic vampires can feed on ambient energy, it's not considered to be a substitute for going straight to the source, as it were. This isn't surprising, given that psychic vampirism is very often caused by an inability to process the normal range of energy that humans need to survive.¹⁹¹ The best way, then, to make up for that deficiency is to feed on someone who has already processed that energy.

Some people make a distinction between unintentional psychic parasites, and conscious psychic vampires. Parasites are the people who, without realizing they are doing so, drain energy from those around them. They tend to be rather depressed, unhappy people, and people who have been fed on by them will feel drained, literally and figuratively.

¹⁸⁸ Kaldera, 2005, p. 83-84, 93-94

¹⁸⁹ Kaldera, 2005, p. 91

¹⁹⁰ Belanger, 2004, p. 9

¹⁹¹ Kaldera, 2005, p. 12

They are the people who are so incredibly emotionally dependent on others that people who spend any significant time around them soon find themselves inexplicably feeling the need to escape. On the other hand, Kaldera includes these people under the vampire heading, explaining that because they have "been doing this sort of thing [feeding] since before they could reason, they may well still be unconscious of it later, in adulthood".¹⁹²

There are also examples of vampirism among people who, as Neserit, a panther therianthrope, puts it, have "psi-vampire tendencies", but may not necessarily identify fully as vampires. As a practice at its simplest level, it is the act of feeding on the energy of a person. Anyone who learns to work with energy can feed; however, not everyone develops the dependency that characterizes vampires. However, it does sometimes occur that a person who is a vampire, energy dependency and all, may also be another type of Otherkin. One anonymous survey respondent is an example, being sanguine vampire and fae. There are also multiple systems in which one person in the body is a vampire but the rest are not.

A few psychic vampires identify with the stories of succubi and incubi, particularly those who feed a lot through sexual activity. While not all who adhere to the descriptions of succubi and incubi are vampires, the motif of feeding/seduction causes overlap between the groups. Butterfly is one such example:

I had learned how to feed several years before I'd even heard of Otherkin - in fact, at the same time I started working with Lilith in 1996. I learned on my own, not from her.

She and I made a pact at that time. She would help me find partners, and she would feed off of my sexual energy during and after congress. It is a symbiotic relationship for us.

*I don't need to feed in order to live physically, and I don't suck out others' life force. I feed on sexual energy, particularly sexual attention. I consider myself part succubus because of this need.*¹⁹³

Lilith is important here, as she is, in legend, the mother of all incubi and succubi. Although she is more known for sexual feeding than blood, this is still reminiscent of psychic vampirism.¹⁹⁴ Additionally, Calaelen, who

¹⁹² Kaldera, 2005, p. 16

¹⁹³ Butterfly, personal correspondence, May 24, 2006

¹⁹⁴ Kaldera, 2005, p. 112-113

is a succubus (but does not identify as a vampire) mention an affinity towards Lilith.

Duo exhibits the traditional vampiric tendencies of kitsune. While he primarily feeds on energy, every so often he craves blood instead. As with other psychic vampires, he gets the best results from human sources. The feeding is a definite need for him, with noticeable differences before and after:

[I]t's not a choice. I need to feed once or twice every month (more, depending on my stress levels and the weather)...When I am well-fed, I can feel my phantom tails far more vividly. They are more active, and my kitsune-bi or 'foxfire' (a kitsune's aura) extends farther out from the body and can even be felt by those sensitive enough to such things. When I'm not so well-fed it hangs closer to my body, just at surface-skin or underneath.¹⁹⁵

The idea of a vampire also being another type of Otherkin is occasionally discouraged, often by those influenced by pop culture images of hatred between vampires and werewolves. It can also go along with other resistance to "blend-a-kins" (see Chapter 9). Says Jezabel:

I doubted that I was therian because I got into a bad crowd of folks when I was younger and was taught that you cannot be vampyric and therian, I really had that engrained in my head. These folks even convinced me that my dream shifts were just my totem "playing tricks" on me or "trying to teach me something". I have come to learn that yes, you can be therian and vampyre, and hey, whatever other nature. There is no "cosmic rule" that says you can only be of one nature. I am proud to be a mutt!

There is also the question of whether a vampire is born or created, similar to the debate among therians. Legends aren't much use at this point, as modern vampires are quite alive, rather than being reanimated corpses. Popular culture makes much of the vampire's bite, which supposedly can turn a human being into a vampire. It's generally accepted among the vampire community, however, that this is only a piece of myth, not truth.

Some vampires insist that a non-vampire cannot become a vampire, no matter what. They say that no vampire is ever created, only Awakened to his condition.¹⁹⁶ Or, if it is possible, it's exceptionally dangerous to both vampire and human, and won't necessarily work.¹⁹⁷ However, Kaldera allows for both "primary vampires", in whom vampirism is inherent, and "secondary vampires", who may develop

¹⁹⁵ Duo, 2006-B

¹⁹⁶ Sanguinarius, 2006-A

¹⁹⁷ Memoryanddream, 2001

vampirism deliberately or accidentally. He explains the former as being "born without the conversion circuits necessary to transform outside energy into human psychic nourishment". Secondary vampires may come about through damage to one's natural ability to absorb energy or through childhood emotional trauma. People may also deliberately become vampires for a variety of reasons ranging from using energy work to enhance one's sex life to drawing energy from others to fuel magical workings.¹⁹⁸ This means that, at the very least, it's possible for Otherkin and non-'kin to become secondary vampires, if they're not already primary, according to this theory. However, the difference between primary and secondary vampires can be compared to physical dietary issues. A primary vampire is like a person with a food allergy who simply cannot process that particular food. A secondary vampire is more along the lines of someone who has been through long-term malnutrition and has temporarily lost the ability to digest certain things.

While Dion Fortune's idea that psychic vampirism is caused by malevolent spirits of dead magicians may seem quaint to modern magic workers and impossible to vampires, the concept of energetic imbalance leading to psychic vampirism may still hold water in at least some cases. Most people who work with energy find out their own limits very quickly if they try to draw only on their own personal reserves. Marcia L. Pickands makes the observation that healers "often end up tired and debilitated after working". This can be counteracted by techniques that involve drawing on ambient energy, the energy of the Earth, or "universal energy". She continues, "If they [the healers] knew how to project only *universal* energy, working would actually leave them more energetic than they were before they started." [*italics hers*]¹⁹⁹ Perhaps some cases of psychic vampirism are caused by people who overexert themselves in some manner and instead of drawing on purely ambient energy, find feeding on specific sources to be easier or more satisfying.

Vampires are the most formally organized group of Otherkin. It should not be assumed, however, that all vampires are associated with a House, and there are certainly some that are perfectly content being independent operators, as it were. However, the Houses generally exist as a safe haven for vampires, particularly newly Awakened ones, as well as to provide information for non-vampires regarding myths and misconceptions. These Houses usually aren't actual physical buildings, though there may be certain members who host meetings, both formal and informal, in their own homes or other regular meeting-places. Some

¹⁹⁸ Kaldera, 2005, p. 12-15

¹⁹⁹ Pickands, 1997, p. 77. Just as a side note, Storm Constantine, who is a Reiki master, mentioned during the copy edit that "Reiki practitioners use universal energy to heal (among other things) and it certainly does prevent you being drained."

Houses network with each other, while others tend to remain independent. Houses may also have internal hierarchies, though these tend to not be rigid, concrete systems resembling cults. In fact, many Houses actively work to dispel the "cult" misinterpretation.

There is a movement among some organized vampires to create a united front; while not all vampires are concerned with community image, there are enough to make it worth noting. This is particularly emphasized as vampires in particular have gained media exposure in recent years. Don Henrie, the vampire from 2004's "Mad, Mad House" is one well-known example of a vampire celebrity. On the other hand, there's the political campaign of Jonathan Sharkey. Sharkey, who says that he is a sanguine vampire, tried to run for the governor of Minnesota for the 2006 elections under the "Vampires, Witches and Pagans Party" of his own creation. His campaign ended rather quickly after he was arrested for stalking and escape.²⁰⁰ In January of 2006 a number of the heads of various Houses had an internet conference to discuss options and where the community was going, which included a brief mention of Sharkey's potentially negative impact on the community image, as well as Henrie's more positive influence.²⁰¹ Most of the dialogue, though, involved fostering good relationships both within and outside of the community, something that will become an increasing concern as media exposure grows.

The Need to Feed and Other Physical Characteristics

As noted in the theories chapter, vampires are unique among Otherkin in that their being Other stems from more than identity and/or memory origins. Vampirism involves dependency on energy sources beyond normal human food, and is tied in more closely to the physical body than other types of 'kin. It can near the intensity of an addiction, and has been described as "similar to addictions to hardcore drugs such as heroine [sic], cocaine, and crystal meth".²⁰²

While sanguine vampires' primary source is willing human donors, psychic vampires have several options. Ambient feeding refers to the practice of drawing on the energy that normally sloughs off of people. This is usually done in crowds of people where the ambient energy level is high. Contact feeding does require contact, either physical or auric. The energy is a bit more concentrated as it's being pulled directly from a person, the same energy that is naturally shed. Deep feeding refers to drawing energy right from someone's energy body, and

²⁰⁰ Anonymous, 2006-F

²⁰¹ See <http://www.psychicvampire.org/discussion1.htm>

²⁰² Davis, unknown

usually occurs when the vampire and a donor are in close physical contact, such as during sex.²⁰³

Results of not feeding range from a general feeling of being run-down to a lower physical immune system. Jezabel, who feeds both on energy and blood, lists some fairly typical symptoms: "Personally, I experience mood swings, nausea, migraines, and a heightened awareness to energy and craving for anything with a high iron count like raw red meat."²⁰⁴ Mora reported similar symptoms, adding that after a certain point she became too weak to feed, requiring a friend to essentially force-feed her. These are fairly in line with symptoms of physical hunger, which shows a similarity between not feeding, and not eating food; however, food does nothing to help the situation. This suggests that there is something essential to the physical effects of feeding. Of course, it could all be psychosomatic, but again we allow ourselves the benefit of a doubt as with all things related to Otherkin. Other vampires report less physical results. The Vampire Psykic presents an article that describes a lack of both psychic/magical talent and low energy levels leading to a general emotional and psychological malaise.²⁰⁵

While both psychic and sanguine vampires must feed, it's not necessary to take the energy without consent. In fact, the vampire community strongly emphasizes only feeding on willing donors in the case of contact and deep feeding. Psychic vampires may feed on ambient energy in a pinch, though it's generally considered the equivalent of junk food, as Mora explains: "I have to take energy from other humans in order to maintain my health. I can sometimes take energy from electrical sources...but this is generally like sugar instead of the protein of human energy". One person even recommends feeding on trees!²⁰⁶ However, there is apparently no substitute for human-derived energy, which may be obtained through emotional turmoil, sexual energy, or physical contact.²⁰⁷

Alternatives to blood may also be found, such as a (non-FDA-approved) vitamin-laced concoction known as HemoSynth.²⁰⁸ Some folks just recommend a rare, bloody steak as a temporary holdover. However, given that blood only seems to hold the majority of its energy for a few minutes after leaving a living body, it's quite possible that this is more of a placebo than a solution.²⁰⁹ Any food that can give one energy may be of use, though what kind of food may vary from vampire

²⁰³ Kaldera, 2005, p. 23-25

²⁰⁴ Jezabel, personal correspondence, 21 May 2006

²⁰⁵ The Vampire Psykic, unknown

²⁰⁶ Anonymous, 2004-A

²⁰⁷ Kaldera, 2005, p. 15

²⁰⁸ Anonymous, unknown-A

²⁰⁹ Kaldera, 2005, p. 93

to vampire.²¹⁰ These won't replace blood, but they can be a temporary holdover until a donor can be found.

Feeding can lead to very dramatic results. Kaldera cites Ron, a secondary vampire with AIDS. Ron says that since he found a partner who would allow him to feed regularly, his symptoms have decreased significantly, which includes his T-cell count. While some of this may be psychosomatic, it does point to the efficacy of feeding, whether the energy is causing the change or not.²¹¹

As with other types of 'kin, some vampires will point to certain physical characteristics as proof of what they are. Belanger lists a number of traits including unique eye color, heightened senses, and particular body types that she sees as more prevalent among vampires.²¹² Enygma lists an entire slew of "characteristics," "abilities", and "traits" (again, not to be confused with roleplaying lingo!). These include everything from photosensitivity and pale skin, to quick reflexes and above-average strength and stamina. Vampires, according to this listing, also tend towards intelligence and independence, as well as nocturnal preferences. The disclaimer is, however, that "These lists of vampire characteristics and traits *should not be used as a checklist* to determine if one is a vampire" (author's emphasis).²¹³

On the other hand, Sphynx Cat lists about twenty characteristics that are commonly mistaken as "proof" of vampirism (and, incidentally enough, being Otherkin in general) and explains the perfectly mundane causes thereof. Some of these characteristics include moodiness, vampire fandom, and photosensitivity. The essay is concluded with a cautionary reminder that it is up to the individual to determine whether feeding is an actual necessity or not.²¹⁴ In addition, Kaldera holds the opinion that there aren't any universal vampiric physical traits beyond feeding, for instance, he explains some vampire's nocturnal schedules by explaining that energy deficiency can throw off a person's circadian rhythms.²¹⁵

Origins

The vampires themselves have individual opinions as to why they were born (or became) vampiric, and how that ties into other aspects of their lives. The anonymous vampire/faerie says that her vampirism relates particularly to the (unspecified) deity she works with. Mora describes

²¹⁰ Future, unknown

²¹¹ Kaldera, 2005, p. 81

²¹² Belanger, p. 66-67

²¹³ Enygma, 2004

²¹⁴ SphynxCatVP, unknown

²¹⁵ Kaldera, 2005, p. 17

several past lives in a priesthood that stressed carrying on magical evolution throughout lifetimes. She explains how her vampirism stems from that:

Vampirism is just the term for those Priests who have advanced to the learned level. In order to do great magic the energy must come from somewhere. Nothing is done without sacrifice. In order to attain the power to create reality we have to take from others. However, this is not seen as a negative thing. Many people would come to the temples and offer up pieces of their soul for help on serious matters.

This resembles some of the material in the *Psychic Vampire Codex*, which brings group reincarnation into the origin of a number of vampires. Certain vampires have an innate shift in their energy levels carried over from life to life that is said to give the vampire control over how s/he will incarnate each time.²¹⁶

Siege also sees his psychic vampirism as a result of a past life. Sairen Min, on the other hand, theorizes that her vampirism is physically inherited. This is a more uncommon viewpoint, though Kaldera argues for the possibility of vampirism being a genetic inheritance.²¹⁷ In multiple systems, both vampiric and nonvampiric people may coexist in the same body, and a vampiric spirit may also walk into a body. One of the Shards illustrates both of these points, in which one of a group of spirits that walked into the same body identifies as a vampire. Others really have no idea where their dependency on additional energy sources came from; it simply manifested as a need to feed on energy in some form. Masticina Akcita is one such example: "The vampire side is five years...six years awoken but what to say, the only information I have about it is damn cryptic and the only thing I know is that I need to feed. My awakening, a sleep problem existing over one year... my whole body changing, adjusting to another energy."

Belanger debunks the rather far-fetched idea of the vampire virus, a physical illness that can supposedly spread vampirism.²¹⁸ Though the idea was spawned by a couple of fictional sources, including a TV miniseries and a movie, it managed to snag a few believers for a period of time.²¹⁹ One such example is from a guest book entry archived on sanguinari.us; an individual known as Prinz Galen wrote in 1998 about "Lost Children, who have been transformed by the 'Serpent's Seed' virus", also blaming it on "Houseless" vampires and bad blood

²¹⁶ Belanger, 2004, p. 72-73

²¹⁷ Kaldera, 2005, p. 12

²¹⁸ Belanger, 2004, p. 6-7

²¹⁹ Faolchú, unknown

transfusions.²²⁰ Suffice it to say, nobody has ever come up with any convincing evidence for a "vampire virus".

Some older occult theories on psychic vampirism can be found in Dion Fortune's classic work, *Psychic Self Defense*. One is that psychic vampires must astrally project in order to feed; while this isn't entirely impossible, the majority of feeding techniques described involve remaining in one's body.²²¹ Another possibility is that vampirism could be caused by possession by a particular spirit:

*[Certain deceased occultists] knew how to avoid...the disintegration of the Astral Body, and maintained themselves in the etheric double by vampirising the wounded [on a battlefield]. Now vampirism is contagious; the person who is vampirised, being depleted of vitality, is a psychic vacuum, himself absorbing from anyone he comes across in order to refill his depleted resources of vitality. He soon...[becomes] a full-blown vampire himself, vampirising others.*²²²

I was unable to find any reliable modern source that supported this idea, nor have I encountered it in casual conversation, so it may be assumed that few, if any, of today's vampires give it any credit.

Winged Wolf goes into great detail about a number of theories she has from a more psi/parapsychological viewpoint. One of the more controversial ones is that some cases of vampirism are caused by an internal energetic parasite. The "symbiont", as she calls it, requires the host to draw in more energy than normal, and grants the host increased physical abilities, but also weaknesses such as the infamous solar sensitivity. It is her belief that removal of this parasite will cure the vampire.²²³

Conversely, Trollkvina goes into detail arguing against Winged Wolf's theoretical cure which, according to the former, may involve removing one's heart chakra (if it's even possible!)²²⁴ And the symbiote theory runs directly counter to conventional wisdom in the vampire community. Still, for those interested in reading more, her website and one of her books is in the bibliography.

Lifestylers and Other Vampire Enthusiasts

The popular image of the sexy, gothic vampire has led to quite a fandom. Lifestylers often adapt their lives and themselves to match their

²²⁰ Galan, 1998

²²¹ Fortune, 1973, p. 56-58

²²² Fortune, 1973, p. 60-61

²²³ Winged Wolf, 2006, p. 17-18, and Winged Wolf, 2005

²²⁴ Trollkvina, unknown

conception of vampirism, usually within a gothic aesthetic. They may dress in goth clothing, wear fake fangs, and uniquely colored contact lenses, and a few even go so far as to drink blood, though they don't necessarily require it.

There is condescension on the part of some vampires towards lifestylers, whom they may see as wannabes. The website of House Eclipse, for example, defines a lifestyler as someone who dresses the part, but no matter how pretty will never be considered an actual vampire by the community.²²⁵ This does not seem to include those psychic and sanguine vampires who enjoy dressing in romantic gothic clothing, getting the fake fangs and black hair dye, and otherwise have fun with the traditional vampiric image.

Another group of non-vampires interested in vampires, but for a different reason, are vampire research groups. Some of these groups seem to completely miss the vampire subculture, instead trying to find people who are literally undead or who will burst into flame if subjected to sunlight. Others are aware of psychic and sanguine vampires, but continue to find proof of the vampires of legend and lore. Among these groups are the Vampire Research Society Worldwide Organization and the Vampire Research Society UK (no relation, apparently).

The Atlanta Vampire Alliance, on the other hand, is a group of vampires who, among other things, are conducting a research study of their own. This is an ambitious project that aims to "address questions about the vampiric experience which have consistently been brought forward as concerns, either by members of the Community or by outside researchers in the professional or academic sectors". In addition to modern vampirism, the study also covers other energy workers. The Vampire and Energy Work Research Study (VEWRS) as well as an expanded version, the Advanced VEWRS, were disseminated throughout the vampire and energy-worker communities starting in 2006. Both are incredibly thorough examinations, with 379 questions on the VEWRS and 609 on the AVEWRS.

As of this writing, the deadline for submitting the surveys is set for right around the time this book is going to press. However, people interested in finding out more information on results may surf over to <http://www.vampiresurvey.com>.

There have been a few other vampire surveys over the years; the only one that seems to have come to any fruition was taken by Sanguinarius.org from 1998 to 2000. While the answers have been compiled into a self published book, you can also find them at <http://www.sanguinarius.org/qresp-01.shtml> in a guestbook style arrangement.

²²⁵ House Eclipse, 2003

DONORS

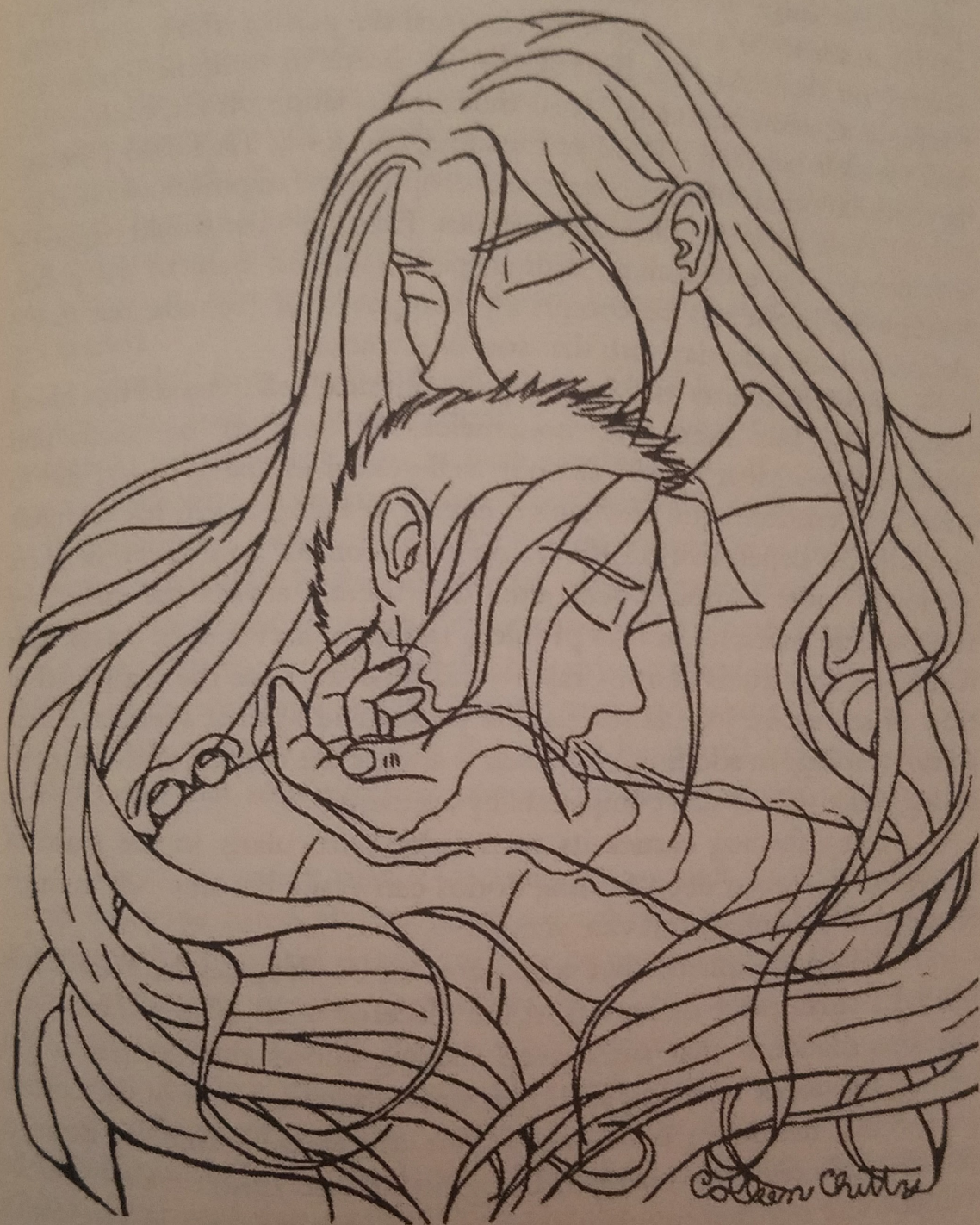
I'm going to take a moment to address the topic of donors. While this is a book on Otherkin, donors are an integral part of vampire culture that deserves to be addressed in this chapter. Donation also yields a number of safety concerns that should be addressed, and since I figure that donors are going to be just as interested in this chapter as vampires, I felt that this would be an appropriate addition. While I think that this is an important section for vampires to read, I am also aiming it at donors.

Ethical feeding is stressed by most vampires. Jezabel is quite firm on this point, particularly in regards to being able to function in everyday society: "You can't let your nature control you, especially in your daytime life. I have willing donors for when I need to feed...I ambient feed or take from the elements to get me by if my donors are unavailable. I can't just go pulling out a lancet or drain someone of their energy while at work."

There are health concerns, particularly in regards to blood donors. As romanticized as vampirism sometimes gets, vampires are no more immune to blood diseases than anyone else. Blood donation should be treated like sex—do it safely! Donors and vampires need to have been tested for HIV/AIDS, the various forms of hepatitis, and other blood-borne illnesses, particularly if the vampire will be feeding directly from the donor's body. In addition, mouths carry a lot of germs, so it might be a better idea to allow the blood to trickle down the skin so that no direct contact is made between the wound and the mouth. Too much blood also induces vomiting, so care must be taken not to drink too deeply. And proper cleanup is a must; the wounds need to be cleaned with hydrogen peroxide and dressed with an over the counter antibiotic cream. Any redness or swelling around the site should be an occasion to visit a doctor.

While sterile lancets are generally safe to use and can be bought at any drug store, knives are another story. Most people do not know how to properly use a knife, as anyone in the BDSM scene can attest to. Sure, that shiny blade sure looks sexy tracing over someone's skin, but it can do a lot more damage than what was intended. Inexperienced knife handlers can cut too deeply or unsteadily, causing scarring at best and serious blood loss and/or internal damage at worst. Even something so innocuous as a craft blade can cause a deeper cut than anticipated. The little plastic lancets aren't as aesthetically pleasing as blades, and they don't offer nearly as large a cut, but they're a lot safer. Another alternative involves using a sterile IV needle to prevent infections via mouth-to-wound contact²²⁶. Kaldera devotes several pages of his book

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solely to safe bloodletting practices, and a substantial portion to vampire-donor relations in general. He's quite thorough, and I highly recommend that both donors and vampires read up.

Donors should be particularly mindful of who they're offering themselves up to. Again, think of feeding in the same light as BDSM—while vanilla sex has its own risks, BDSM takes it up a notch due to the power exchange and bodily damage issues. Just like a submissive, a donor needs to be very sure s/he can trust the person who's going to be cutting hir flesh. As with BDSM, the key words in vampiric feeding are "safe, sane, and consensual" (For more information on the connections and parallels between BDSM and feeding, check out *The Female Dominant* by Claudia Varrin which has an entire chapter on vampirism and kink.).

Then there are the liability issues. Imagine what would happen if a donor was unintentionally injured, panicked, and went to the police. The media might not be completely composed of tabloids, but they'd definitely have a heyday with that sort of situation.

Psychic donors may not have the physical health issues that blood donors do, but there are nonetheless matters to be taken into consideration. Most people are not well-versed in energy work, and so have little control over how much energy is being taken; for the most part, they're dependent on the vampire to control how much is taken. Although most vampires feed ethically, there's always the chance of running into one who has no problem taking whatever s/he wants. This is the energetic equivalent of rape—and here we have the same level of trust as sex again. Just as sex can be performed against someone's will, so can feeding. In addition, too, there's always the chance of the vampire taking more than is safe completely by accident.

Deep feeding carries its own risks, particularly in the realm of emotions. A regular deep-feeding donor can easily become very strongly attached to a vampire and vice versa.

Belanger explains that when a vampire deep feeds, s/he leaves behind a small piece of herself in the place of what s/he has removed. She also mentions that since deep feeding allows the vampire to get beyond the donor's shields, s/he may have access to parts of the donor's psyche that the donor is uncomfortable revealing.²²⁷ And, as Belanger points out, because the energy is being transferred from the donor to the vampire and not both ways, it's easier for a donor to fall in love with a vampire—but without that love being returned. If this bond is not properly addressed what was once love can turn into hate, or at least deep regret.²²⁸ This means that great care must be taken, even with one-time deep feedings, as emotional wounds can be just as devastating as

²²⁷ Belanger, 2004, p. 107

²²⁸ Belanger, 2004, p. 133

physical ones, if not worse, and can take much longer to heal, as any lover who's been rejected can tell you. Vampires ought to be aware of the potential negative impact they can have, and communicate that effectively to the donor prior to deep feeding. Both should have great discretion in choosing potential partners in the act of feeding.

It's to a donor's definite advantage to learn about energy work and shielding against psychic attack. There are a number of books that deal with these topics; Dion Fortune's *Psychic Self-defense* is a classic, though a bit dry if you're not used to early 20th century occult texts. Barbara Brennan's *Hands of Light* goes into considerable detail about general energy work, unethical psychic vampirism, and healing. Brennan's work is also referenced in *Inner Alchemy*, which includes detailed chapters on basic, intermediate, and advanced energy work. Just like physical self defense, psychic self defense is a definite must. Chances are you won't have to use it, but it's good to have in that rare case where it's needed.

Finally, keep in mind—you are NEVER obligated to allow someone to feed on you. It doesn't matter what line you're given; consent is as important here as with anything else. If someone forces you to give energy, it's going to be difficult trying to explain the situation to the authorities, in which case it's best to simply avoid the vampire(s) in question entirely. On the other hand, *ANY physical threat, whether real or implied, is a crime, and any physical threat carried out is assault!* In the event of any physical harm, you should defend yourself as best as you can, get the hell out of the situation, and go directly to the authorities. Yes, it's going to be embarrassing to explain to them what happened, but not reporting it may mean that someone else is going to get hurt later on down the line.

There are safety issues for vampires as well. In addition to the safety concerns listed above, there are other factors to bring in. For instance, will a potential donor's energy be good for you? If you happen to be a very tense person, particularly when you haven't fed in a while, you may want to find a donor who's more of a relaxed, Type B personality. Kaldera also recommends avoiding feeding from those who are physically or mentally ill; not only will the energy from both be potentially tainted, but the latter, depending on illness, may become violent once you begin to feed.²²⁹ In fact, he dedicates an entire chapter of his book to negotiating romantic-sexual-feeding relationships between vampires and donors; it's definitely worth checking out. Additionally, specifically to sanguine vampires, Orthaevelve has written an essay of both mundane and magical concerns specific to blood feeding.²³⁰

²²⁹ Kaldera, 2005, p. 26-27

²³⁰ Orthaevelve, 2006

Do keep in mind that I am neither a vampire nor a donor, so this should not be taken as a complete guide to donorship. I recommend the sources mentioned above, as well as consulting other members of the vampire community, rather than taking my suggestions on their own.

Dispelling the Myths

Show a vampire a clove of garlic and s/he is likely either to laugh or think about pasta possibilities. Running water and religious items of any flavor generally don't faze them either, and they reflect in a mirror as well as anyone. Vampires don't physically change into mist, bats, or wolves, though there are occasional cases of vampiric therianthropes—not surprisingly, they tend towards predatory phenotypes. In addition, some vampires do work with animal totems in their spirituality and magical practices, and again these are often, though not always, carnivores. Vampires can fly—but only in airplanes, gliders, and helicopters. And while some vampires may choose to have dental augmentation done, most have perfectly human-sized canine teeth.

Being bitten by a vampire won't make you one, and donating blood too often just leads to the usual symptoms of blood loss. Nor will being born in a caul (placenta), with teeth or hair, or on any particular day of the year predispose you to vampirism.

Contrary to pop culture, vampires won't burst into flame if exposed to sunlight, though some do report getting sunburn or getting heat exhaustion very easily. A couple of survey respondents reported that their hair and nails grow at an incredibly rapid pace, though this isn't a universal trait. In addition, Zatara reported having particularly large canine teeth, though an unsympathetic orthodontist removed them when he got braces.

Mythology surrounding vampires is almost overwhelmingly negative. While some more recent depictions show vampires in a more sympathetic light, the vast majority of stories show predatory, parasitic evil beings. Those who identify as vampires, however, run the usual spectrum of morals, beliefs, and behaviors typical to all people. Some even try to turn their vampirism into a bonus. Zatara has found a unique way to work his being 'kin into his choice of profession:

[[Just knowing what I really am effects my daily life [sic]. Career wise I believe it will be a positive. I'm a nursing student now and will graduate to be an RN. I feel I have an ability to heal that most people don't. It's natural to take energy as a Vampire but as a Vampire I can also give it. I want to use my natural abilities for good, not just my selfish needs.

This is a rather broad category, and there's debate as to who's categorized where. Some people include elves among the fey, some do not; the same goes for categorizing Sidhe. The Elenari in general say that as they did not originate from Faery, they are not fey. In addition, while some say the Tuatha de Danaan are elves, some of the Tuatha disagree. Then there's the possible connection between faeries and/or elves and aliens, elves with celestial origins, and the vocabulary used by some elves that has been transcribed from past life memories that further defines groups. Needless to say, once again this is a chapter in which it must be stressed that these are generalizations, not hard-and-fast rules.

Mythological Roots

*The folk are the grandest I have ever seen. They are far superior to us, and that is why they are called the Gentry. They are...a military-aristocratic class, tall and noble appearing. They are a distinct race between our race and that of spirits, as they have told me. Their qualifications are tremendous. "We could cut off half the human race, but would not," they said, "for we are expecting salvation"...Their sight is so penetrating, that I think they would see through the earth. They have a silvery voice, quick and sweet. The music they play is most beautiful. They take the whole body and soul of young and intellectual people who are interesting, transmuting the body to a body like their own...*²³¹

The faeries and elves of mythology are as varied as storytellers themselves. Large or small, humanoid or animalistic, beautiful or hideous, a wide range of beings are under the aegis of Faerie.

The origins of these beings vary. From Ireland comes the idea that they were angels who fell from Heaven but weren't quite bad enough to go to Hell, and so are sort of stuck in their own little world.²³² Some speculate that they are the remnants of neolithic cultures. The Tuatha de Danaan are linked historically to Irish burial mounds, where they retreated after the invasion of the Milesians, ancestors of the modern Irish. Davidson suggests that elves in Norse mythology, rather diminutive beings, may once have been the giants of older lore, which mirrors another belief that the fey are the old pagan gods lessened by a

²³¹ Harpur, 2003, p. 29

²³² Keightley, 1978, p. 363 and Lysaght, 1986, p. 44

lack of worshippers. He brings up another theory, one mirrored elsewhere, that they are in fact the spirits of the dead, but that there is also a close connection between elves and "land-spirits" which are not considered to be ancestral.²³³

The banshee (Irish *bean si*, "fairy woman") has a rich mythos surrounding the ancestor-spirit possibility. According to Patricia Lysaght's phenomenal work, *Banshee: The Irish Death Messenger*, the idea that the banshee is kin to other fairies of Ireland is actually a rare one. Rather, most of her sources, which included many testimonials and sightings from the late 19th century and early 20th century, point strongly towards her being an ancestor spirit. Sometimes she is linked to the keening women, mortal females who would wail at the death of a family member.²³⁴ This ties in quite well with the commonly reported idea that banshees are attached to certain families, to whom it may be assumed they are related.

However, a more common belief that tends to be preferred today is that faeries are manifestations of natural phenomena.²³⁵ Animism, the earliest form of religion known to humanity, assigns spirits to every living thing. Trees in particular were often venerated as conscious beings. Porphyry stated, upon observation of "primitive" cultures, "For why should the slaughter of an ox or a sheep be a greater wrong than the felling of a fir or an oak, seeing that a soul is implanted in these trees also?"²³⁶ The longevity of trees lends them a particular air of wisdom and permanence, and it's only been recently that humans have mostly abandoned their veneration. Some cultures decree all trees to be sacred and possessed of spirit, others point to a specific few species; the Druids of some Celtic cultures particularly revered the oak.

Just as there are rules and taboos regarding what animals may or may not be hunted, so there are specific rituals surrounding the felling of trees. In Dalmatia the custom was that if a spirit-tree was cut by accident a chicken would have to be sacrificed on the stump to avoid retribution. In a particular group of traditional tribes in Africa, the silk-cotton tree is held to be particularly sacred; if one is to be harvested offerings of poultry and palm oil must be made. If this is not done, the woodcutter may be put to death by his people. These sacrifices are done because of the suffering the tree experiences; many cultures reported that felled trees cried or screamed audibly.²³⁷ (Incidentally, a researcher named Cleve Backster ran a number of tests in 1966 in which he hooked a dracaena cane plant to a polygraph machine. He threatened to burn the

²³³ Davidson, 1969, p. 117

²³⁴ Lysaght, 1986, p. 47-50

²³⁵ Keightley, 1978, p. 3

²³⁶ Frazer, 1993, p. 111

²³⁷ Frazer, 1993, p. 112-3

plant, at which point the polygraph registered severe stress. This was the beginning of the body of study known as primary perception.)²³⁸

Certain people believed that the trees were inhabited by ancestral spirits, which ties two traditions of faerie origin together. Considering that the appeasement of the ancestors is one of the deepest-running threads of religious evolution, it's no surprise that those who held to this belief were quite reverent towards those trees suspected of housing someone who'd died. Again, the prohibition against cutting these trees features strongly in this tradition. Among the Tuhoe, a group of Maoris of New Zealand, the ancestral connection of trees was such that umbilical cords were hung from their branches to reassert the connection between past and present generations.²³⁹ This concept in particular raises a piece of evidence towards the reincarnation theory, because it allows for the transmigration of a soul from human to tree; it's not too far of a stretch to then surmise that the opposite could occur.

Probably the most famous tree-spirits are the dryads of Greek mythology, who dwelled in forests with other wood-nymphs. According to legend, dryads were birthed with the sprouting of their trees; if a dryad's tree was cut down, she would die.²⁴⁰ Other culture-specific tree spirits are some Hindu *devas*, Buddhist *yakshis* and *yakshas*, and Slavic *leshys*.²⁴¹

The lore of nature-spirits that became the fey is not limited to trees, however. Some fey resonate strongly with animals. Satyrs and their kin are a good example. Described either as goat-human hybrids or just goats, satyrs seemed to originate from Pan, a well-known woodland god of Arcadia, as did their Italian cousins, fauns. A lesser-known counterpart is the *ljeschi* of Russian folklore.²⁴² Several types of British and Irish fey, including kelpie and phoukas, took the form of horses. And the black dog of cryptozoology is sometimes thought of as a faerie hound, though those dogs are more often described as white with red ears. However, the fact that the black dog often represents a death omen and is often seen in graveyards or at crossroads ties it back to the ancestor-spirit theory.²⁴³

Most fey are humanoid in appearance, though obviously not human. Some, such as brownies and gnomes, are diminutive and stout, while pixies are tiny and winged. Many later accounts of faerie sightings are of beings that are exactly like humans, simply smaller. The sidhe are

²³⁸ Pilkington, 2004

²³⁹ Frazer, 1993, p. 115, 119

²⁴⁰ Bulfinch, 1981, p. 137

²⁴¹ Altman, 2000, p. 17

²⁴² Frazer, 1993, p. 464-5

²⁴³ Clark, 1993, p. 38-41

often described as particularly beautiful, but human-sized. Others are a bit more alien in appearance; merfolk and nixies appear human from the waist up, but below the navel they have the bodies and tails of various fish.

Human mythology places two bands of fey and elves in opposition to each other, often in relation to how the fey ones interacted with humanity. Norse mythos divides the elves into both light and dark categories.²⁴⁴ This division does not appear in folklore quite as often as in modern storytelling, however. There are distinct differences in how various fey beings interact with humanity; the brownies and other helpful fey are shown as opposite dangerous ones like kelpies. Others, including W.B. Yeats, point to the dichotomy between "trooping" and "solitary" faeries. Keightley says that British faeries are classified by whether they live indoors with humans, or outdoors in the wilderness.²⁴⁵ All are seen in a light of caution, however, as at least from the human perspective the fey are capricious as a lot.

The faeries and elves described as "light" or "seelie" include brownies and other faeries that perform household chores while people sleep. They are generally well-disposed to humanity or will remain neutral, though they are quite dangerous if crossed. "Dark" or "unseelie" faeries are often accused of stealing children and leaving changelings in their place. Others may lead travelers into swamps to drown. Still others are blamed for souring milk or letting livestock loose—in other words, scapegoats for bad luck. Some of these hapless occurrences may be averted by leaving offerings such as milk out at night. One household that did so discovered a neighbor who had been thought to have passed away several years before, but had instead been taken by the faeries. The woman came and drank the milk left out, and when she was confronted she confessed her tale.²⁴⁶ On the other hand, leaving clothing out for helpful faeries often causes them to disappear and never return; one group of servants in a great household deliberately left clothing to rid their home of a brownie who had become more obnoxious than helpful.²⁴⁷

The prohibition against iron has rather mundane roots according to one theory. As iron tools replaced wood and bronze, older cultures that were reluctant to adapt to innovations observed taboos against the new objects. Even as iron was slowly integrated into everyday life, it still held a certain miasma about it. Thus began the stories that the Good Folk, who were from times before humanity, were naturally adverse to

²⁴⁴ Davidson, 1969, p. 115 and Keightley, 1978, p. 78

²⁴⁵ Keightley, 1978, p. 281

²⁴⁶ Yolen, 1986, p. 115-116

²⁴⁷ Keightley, 1978, p. 296-297

the new metal. In holding with the idea that the Tuatha were a Bronze Age culture, the conquest by an Iron Age culture could ostensibly lead to the hatred of iron. This is why legendary proof against glamour is iron or steel carried on the person.

While the traditional belief in faeries has mostly died away, Great Britain and Ireland have remained strongholds of well-known faerie lore. Several concentrated surveys were taken in the first half of the 20th century regarding Irish folk beliefs and experiences involving the banshee. Another was distributed in the 1970s.²⁴⁸ Belief in changelings was so great that it was used as a defense in the 1895 murder of Bridget Cleary by her husband, with several relatives as accomplices. Angela Bourke, in her phenomenal book on the case, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, explains that the true motivations may well have been more mundane. However, there was a strong enough belief in changeling lore that the murderers tried to hide their actions behind it.

Modern neopaganism and New Age beliefs have caused a resurgence in belief in faeries and elves. However, a lot of this is focused on the friendly Victorian pixie type faeries, rather than the more cautionary tales of earlier times. Elves were mostly seen as Santa's helpers until the Lord of the Rings movies came out in the first few years of the 21st century. This leads quite nicely into...

Elves, Fey, and Modern Mythology

In the past few centuries there have been several revivals of faerie lore in contemporary media. Though the belief in the fair folk survived in various forms in rural areas, it was discouraged more in cities, first reviled as evil by the Catholic Church, and then perceived as hopelessly pastoral and uneducated. William Shakespeare, however, centered his comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, on the tricks and games of Titania, Oberon, Puck, and their ilk. Here, faeries were portrayed as relatively harmless and playful. However, a 1978 BBC film production of the play returns the court to a more feral state—Oberon is a dark night in which the lunar-ethereal Titania strides, and Puck bears small but sharp fangs and moves like a small hunting beast.

The Victorian era was rife with pixies and other diminutive fey beings, continuing in the vein taken by Shakespeare. Paintings and other works by such artists as Browning portrayed a world in miniature, with fey royalty astride mice. This belief culminated in the Cotingly photographs, in which two young teenaged girls arranged cutouts of Victorian faeries in pictures with each other and provided them as insurmountable proof of the existence of the fey. While the photos were

²⁴⁸ Lysaght, 1986, p. 16-23

obviously contrived, their photographers Frances Griffiths and Elsie Wright insisted to the end that there were, indeed, faeries in the garden and that they had seen them.

Modern Otherkin seeking inspiration for personal mythology and "family resemblances" rarely look in the Victorian direction, preferring either ancient mythology or the mythos that was birthed in the 20th century. Without a doubt, no author has had more impact on modern interpretations of elves, dwarves, and halflings than J.R.R. Tolkien. Drawing from classic Norse and Teutonic mythology, he wove a modern legend that inspired countless other fantasy realms. His work didn't stop with the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy; for instance, he elaborates further on elves in *The Silmarillion*. The richness of his writing extended even to creating languages and scripts for the different races of Middle Earth; it's not uncommon to see elven script used as a working alternate alphabet.

Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks* was one of the earliest novels mixing modern society with Faerie. Set in Minneapolis, the story features both the Seelie and Unseelie courts (a literary mainstay, it would seem) in a battle over the city. However, the Seelie court isn't much more trustworthy than the Unseelie, and intrigue overlaps the magic as the plot thickens. The characters, rather than being exaggerations, are simply the author's idea of what would happen if beings from Faerie were to infiltrate our world. Although often overshadowed by later urban faerie works, this is truly a fantasy classic.

Charles de Lint continues in this juxtapositional style. The fey world finds openings through the creative people in society, and has a definite impact on the physical realm. The settings aren't necessarily pretty, and his fey aren't always nice. Still, de Lint mixes the mundane world and Faerie with such skill that he has an excellent following.

While Mercedes Lackey's urban elf books are popular, they tend towards rather saccharine plotlines (always involving a child or children in distress and clear delineations between the good guys and the bad guys). In addition, she takes some serious liberties with lore—for instance, one book features a male banshee (as mentioned earlier, the word comes from *bean-si*, which means faerie woman). Still, they create a good atmosphere for escapism, where the good guys win and the Seelie elves get everything worked out for the best in the end.

Laurell K. Hamilton's Meredith Gentry series takes her fantasy-erotica writing into the Seelie and Unseelie courts. Appropriately, there's a lot of ambiguity about just who exactly the "good guys" are. While some people get annoyed that there's more sex than story, the setting and characters are well-crafted. She draws a lot from Celtic mythology without really sugarcoating it beyond what is necessary to fit it to her

style. A book from her earlier series, *Bloody Bones*, also features faerie characters, though in nowhere as much detail as in the Gentry books.

While books about them abound, elves and fey haven't seen much time on film, compared to the glut of vampire and shapeshifter movies and TV series out there. Still, there's the occasional appearance. Unfortunately a lot of these are composed of some truly abysmal movies (as if *Leprechaun* wasn't bad enough, one of the sequels had the demented version of the Notre Dame mascot in miniature racing through a ghetto attacking gang members.). *A Gnome Named Gnorm* starred a rather adorable little animal-faced critter, but the storyline was less than stellar and occasionally relied on crude humor to get viewers through it.

The greatest occurrence of elves and fey are in childrens' movies (though there are plenty of adults who love them, too.). *Labyrinth* starred David Bowie, a fitting Goblin King, amid a cast of Jim Henson's faerie creations in an appropriately magical setting. *The Dark Crystal*, while it didn't include traditional entities, was fey enough in its flavor, and the gelflings are quite obviously descended mythologically from the Fair Folk.

The Seventh Stream, a made-for-TV movie, features a story about selkies in a small Irish coastal village. The movie version of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy includes ethereal portrayals of elves, dwarves, goblins, and orcs. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, based on C.S. Lewis' book, the faun Mr. Tumnus is joined by various fey beings, including impressively-animated centaurs. Kevin Kline's 1999 Hollywoodization of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a rather cluttered affair compared to earlier versions of the film, including the Academy Award-winning 1935 version.

As with movies, comic books with fey characters are a recent phenomenon. Neil Gaiman is responsible for a good bit of this within D.C.'s Vertigo line. Faeries make notable appearances in *Sandman*, *Books of Magic*, and *The Dreaming*, and Gaiman's collaboration with artist Charles Vess, *Stardust*, is a four-book faerie tale due to be released as a movie in 2007.

Probably the most famous relevant comic is the *Elfquest* series. It features a tribe of elves who structure their lives around the packs of wolves who befriend and work with them. They're smaller than humans in this comic, and resemble their lupine counterparts more than Tolkien's regal gentry. Several spinoffs of the original series were created, as was a roleplaying game. In addition, several anthologies of short stories surrounding the *Elfquest* world were released.

Roleplaying games have featured elves and faeries ever since the first version of *Dungeons and Dragons* came out, and elves have since become a staple in the genre—the elven ranger is practically a cliché. White Wolf's *Changeling: the Dreaming* followed in the company's habit of

weaving folklore in with storytelling and creating another world where magic and mundane overlap. *C&D* can appeal to some Otherkin simply because of the theme of being both human and nonhuman at the same time, and because it brings the magic of the Other into the everyday world. *C&D* is unique in that it not only delves into European mythos, but also African and American Indian faerie lore.

Elves

Elves are one of the larger groups of Otherkin. While some are content to simply refer to themselves as elves, others use terminology gleaned from past/alternate life memories. Arhuaine and Casteylan are an example, referring to themselves as Aloryan. Yet, as Arhuaine said earlier, few people recognize that name but do understand what an "elf" is; they simply use the more familiar term, when describing themselves.

Elves tend to more closely resemble J.R.R. Tolkien's mythos than tales of "little people", though again it should be mentioned that Tolkien's elves merely resemble some elves' kin selves. The "typical" elf (and I use this term only as a generalization) is fair, tall and slender, though the stereotypical pointed ears are not mentioned as often as one would expect. Wings are occasionally mentioned, sometimes as a result of hybridization. Tolkien wasn't so far off-base from mythology, as his elves resemble the Scandinavian alfar he researched.²⁴⁹

From my own experience, almost every Otherkin elf I've met in person has strongly resembled his 'kin side. While not all of them are tall and willowy, they've all carried themselves with a certain unmistakable grace. There are, of course, plenty of elves I haven't met, and doubtless some of them deviate from my own experience. But there does appear to be a stronger correlation between 'kin sides and human appearances among elves than in most groups of 'kin, which is backed up by most of the elven survey respondents.

This does not mean, of course, that these are universal traits, or that all elves place importance on similarities between their previous and present appearances. For some, the physical appearance is inconsequential to being an elf:

*Destroy the human body, and there is no manifestation of its life force; destroy a wire, and there is no manifestation of electric light: the human body seems to be merely incidental in the history of the individual consciousness, as a wire is incidental to electric light.*²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Korablev, unknown

²⁵⁰ W.Y. Evans-Wentz, unknown

Therefore, to attempt to define a physical form for the Danaans is to attempt to define all forms, as rebirth/reincarnation can occur in many forms. (Aine)

The Silver Elves added in their own survey:

Our race is really a spiritual, rather than physical one; what denotes us as Silver Elves is not pointed ears nor faerie wings, nor any other physical characteristic, but rather, an undying devotion to our people, our culture, the Sacred Mother Earth and, in as much as it is within our power, the promotion of the evolution of humanity and all of living kind. No phantom limbs, but as you look at us in the right light, you can see our pointed ears.

Once again, the journey is a very personal one, and what is important to one person may be ignored by another.

The Elenari are particularly noteworthy for their collected memories. They believe they originated from other planets, and came here to avoid destruction by an entity known as the Corruption. They tend to be very culture-oriented as a whole, and have invested much effort in attempting to reclaim memories of their previous lives. They tend to be quite attracted to magic, sometimes saying that they are inherently magical beings. The memories that have been recovered by a number of Elenari create a world that resembles a good fantasy setting, but which is taken quite seriously.

The Elenari are broken up into a number of different subsets, categorized both by physical characteristics and culture during their lives as elves. The Tulari were fair-skinned and were either arboreal or plains-dwelling, and had a fairly formal culture. The Listari resembled the Tulari, but were paler in skin and hair, generally lived in colder areas, and were not so formal in structure. The Draestari, who possessed very dark skin, lived in tribes either in forests or, later, underground. The solitary Kalthilas were sylvan nomads who weren't so much a culture in and of themselves, but rather individuals from other groups who chose the nomadic lifestyle. The Dai'ari, too, were defined more by a nocturnal culture than physical characteristics, and drew members from all other groups. The aquatic Gae'ari were unique, living in underwater dwellings. The Shiri were a caste-based subculture that, again, drew from all groups, but most came from the Tulari.²⁵¹

The Vor'jen are a different story. The Elenari tend to claim that these entities were elves who had fallen prey to the Corruption. However, a differing viewpoint says that the Vor'jen simply preferred more feral existences, working magic that involved shapeshifting into wild animals. Genetic isolation led to the Vor'jen more resembling their

²⁵¹ K'Llayna, 2000

animals than the elves they'd descended from. Eventually the two groups found cause to go to war with each other.²⁵²

While the Aloryans, Arhuaine and Casteylan, are not Elenari, they, too, have complex memories of their previous lives. Arhuaine describes what she remembers:

Generally speaking, the elven culture in Alorya was one of a species in decline, fading away due to diminishing population. Technology-wise it was mainly low-tech, medieval, though there were some odd anomalies which I believe were technological rather than magical. Holographic generators would be one example, also a crystalline device for long-distance communication. Don't ask how they worked, I've no idea! Magic was present though not common except in certain family bloodlines.

Arhuaine further elaborates on Aloryan culture and its inhabitants, the Eldari, in an essay located at http://www.otherkin.net/harmonyDiscord/arc/magical_creatures/eldari.html. Incidentally, Jarandhel also mentions originating from Alorya, though he doesn't go into as much detail. He does mention that he prefers not to use the term Eldari.

As with all other complex memories, these can sometimes be mistaken as "fantasy". However, both the Elenari and the Aloryans show evidence of having questioned and worked over these memories, comparing them with others for consistency, and not accepting anything just because it sounds good.

Elves very commonly report traditional reincarnation as their origin, as is evidenced above. However, this is not universal. Rhianna says, for example:

It's more of an incarnation or a manifestation of self in this particular reality or dimension of the universe. I came here when this body was about 18 months old, so I would be considered more of a walk-in, technically speaking. I think that the Tuatha have a very real, very living culture that continues and thrives to this very day. I'm not really sure why I'm here or the specifics of how I even got here, but there is a part of me that feels that I am here at the request and behest of my House and people for whatever reason they see fit and I guess that's enough, for me, for now at any rate.

Jarandhel, while he mostly holds with the idea of reincarnation, also considers that he could have "allegorical, or concurrent or even future incarnations". V, on the other hand, attributes her being an elf to "Choice of form. There is something I was sent here to do". And Janus Aran theorizes "I came here voluntarily, through a form of projection.

²⁵² Aladar, unknown

My best theory involved a kind of quantum entanglement between my mind and a native human's".

As for Awakening, elves at the very least tend to suspect there's something "different" about them from a young age. Some elves also report strange events occurring as children (though they're hardly the only kin to do so). Aine tells of a rather graphic childhood memory:

When I was 3 or so, I recall making marks with a pencil on paper and actually seeing the molecules of graphite rolling off the edge of the pencil and attaching themselves to the paper (not knowing then what a molecule is or what electrostatic charges are, but learning about it later in school).

Others simply felt that they just didn't fit in. Arhuaine says, "I always knew that I didn't belong in this world...When I was young, I would often go to some quiet place and shout at the sky, at the top of my lungs, yelling for the people I *really* belonged to, to come down in their spaceship and take me home."

This doesn't cover every case, of course. Violin Goddess never considered the idea of being Otherkin until someone else mentioned it:

My Awakening was a little different than most peoples'. I was told that I was elven when I was 23. I know that sounds stupid, but it was something that I was told by a friend of mine that I trusted at the time...Normally, someone being just told they were something wouldn't stick. But it stuck with me because I felt the truth in it. It just felt right.

Still others came to their conclusions as a result of magical or mundane events completely unrelated to 'kin. Rhianna's Awakening was sparked by a Samhain (neopagan holiday for the dead held at the same time as Halloween) ritual. Brendan's suspicions were raised after he had an allergic reaction to iron in a science class in high school.

While works of fiction acted as catalysts for some elven Awakenings, generally speaking the stories and settings are considered to only resemble memories rather than being taken as literal truth. The works of Tolkien triggered memories for some, while Rialian mentions first resonating with one of Gael Baudino's earliest short stories. The Silver Elves, in *The Magical Elven Love Letters*, weave quite a bit of Tolkien's imagery into their writing, but it's more of a model of personal mythology than a wholesale assumption of literal truth.

Some debate whether the Tuatha de Danaan are elves or only similar to them. Rhianna, being Tuatha herself, puts it very simply: "Tuatha de Danaan -- which is subtyped as elven by some, fae by others, and even sidhe, but for myself, I just prefer to use the term 'Tuatha de Danaan' as it's the most accurate and doesn't really leave any room for

what if's or debate." On the other hand, Áine describes herself as being of the "Tuatha De Danaan of the Sídh (some would say Faery)". And then Janus, another Tuatha, says that "Elf gives a pretty good description of our general physical makeup". Once again, this illustrates that identification and categorization are largely individual choices.

Opinions also vary as to whether sídh are elves (or fey), or simply another case of resemblance. Eshari gives a detailed description of her memories and experiences of what makes the sídh unique:

Sídh doesn't have a lot of unique characteristics (one of the things that confuses us with elves and faery), being in the general class of "humanoid", although mostly non-solid. We have a particular radiance that faery may not and elves generally do not have. I am very uncertain about whether we had wings, although my current body appears to have a set (etheric, that is) and I occasionally experience them as "phantom limbs". In this body, at least, I also seem to have an extra (or at least separate) "chakra" which I refer to as "my star", and is a focus of glamour in the body. (I was somewhat surprised when Dan O'Dea, whom I've known online for a long time and respect greatly in matters of sídh/elfen experience, verified that such a thing existed in sídh and that it wasn't just me, that he and other sídh had them too.)

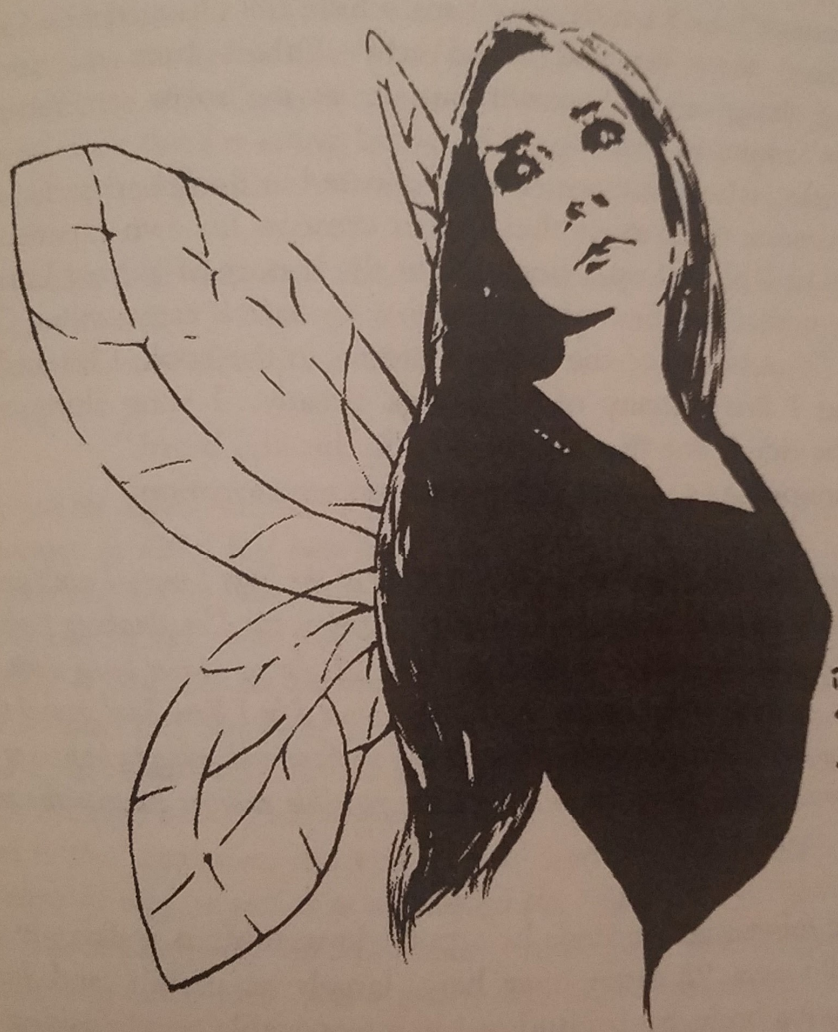
Brendan, who is also sídh, has phantom wings as well.

On the other hand, there's Sa'arine, whose thoughts on the topic are clear: "I first thought I was Fae, though it didn't feel complete. I then thought about Elven, and it clicked. I did some research and the more I read the more it fit, with individual quirks. People aren't cut out of a mold...The title-Elf, Dryad, Faerie-doesn't matter. I simply am who I am-those are names." The Silver Elves have to say on the subject: "We have no strict definition as to who is or what precisely constitutes an elf...for those who come to us and ask, 'Am I an Elf?' We can only respond, 'Are you?'"²⁵³

Faeries and Fey Kín

While elves tend to follow certain similarities, fey beings comprise a diverse group that range from relatively humanoid to unearthly animals. This holds true as much for fey Otherkin as for the mythology surrounding them. I received surveys from all sorts of fey, including phoukas, a satyr, a selkie, and "just call me a faerie". Bandora describes herself as "a mix of a couple of faery species. My particular kind have accented face features including ears, almond shaped eyes, dragonfly

²⁵³ Silver Elves, 2001, p. 90



type wings, bluish-glowy skin, very thick wiry yet fairly straight hair and joints that can bend to any angle (i.e. bend sideways as well as up and down)". Needless to say, there's no one right way to describe a faerie.

Past lives tend to be the most common explanations for being 'kin among fey. As is common, Sa'arine compared her memories to who she is now, and also found confirmation from other people: "What I've remembered, generally, I know to be me, who I am. It makes too much logical sense as to why I am the way I am. I have not changed who I am; I merely have come to understand why. Others have mentioned remembering things about me, without me saying so or remembered details I didn't mention."

Lysander, whose memories were covered in the theories chapter, mentions a unique occurrence that further cements his own experience: "[A]t one point I picked up a book about the history of leaving Ireland through our verbal tradition of story and song, which came with a CD, and, before I'd read any of the lyrics or stories in the book, I listened to the CD, and I knew many of the songs already...I sung along with several on the ride home that I had never (in this life) heard."

Rhyannon has a unique perspective on reincarnation:

I think that my soul has always been fae, regardless of the form I wore. I can't say for certain whether I was ever actually physically a faery, but I'm thinking probably not, as faeries are not necessarily physical creatures. As far as faeries being immortal, I think we are, but not in the sense of never dying, more like I have lived several times before and I think I will keep coming back forever without ever going to heaven or hell or reaching nirvana or any of the infinite other possible endings because the entire purpose of my lives is to live.

While classic reincarnation tends to be reported more often, walking in also occurs. Erelin says "I came over here, largely as myself, and found myself without a body. So I found one in a reasonably good position but not yet noticed, and I took it before a human had the chance. If I had to describe it in one word, I would say 'Possession,' but I did so without fighting anyone else for it."

"I recall being somewhere around age eight and looking out at the stars, trying to figure out which one was 'home' coz [sic] I knew for sure I wasn't from around here," sade says of her unorthodox childhood. "At age eleven(ish – maybe ten) I had a dream where I was 'killed' by a werewolf and though my body died, I was still here, unable to be seen or to communicate with any of my friends. I've since come to consider this a step in an ongoing shamanic process – I certainly felt it

Marked me at the time, and I was already the class weirdo. At an alternative school. In the 60's."

Again, Awakening may happen later in life, but often as a confirmation of what you've always known since you were young. Sometimes it's a matter of reading something that puts what you've always suspected into clearer terms. This doesn't always occur with fiction that resembles past lives; sometimes nonfiction will do the trick. *Sade* is a good example:

[S]omewhere around 1985 I ran across an article in Circle Network News by the Silver Elves that talked about elves/fae incarnating in human bodies, and boy, did THAT ever click. Gave me a name for what I'd already long figured out about myself. Since then I've actively considered myself Other, although it would be another ten years or so before I encountered the term.

Lysander had the not uncommon experience of being clued in by someone else. "I'd always known that there was something 'different' about me, ever since I was little, but I was never really sure what it was," he says.

I think the biggest realization that I was definitely not human came when my clever roommate (a sidhe) had been feeding me "human treats" (goodies he enchanted via kitchen witchery, to help make his coworkers...mundanes all...more tolerable, and try to awaken any whom they suspected to be likewise other kin) and I had not been reacting to them like his coworkers, no reports of strange dreams, and no changes in my behavior. One day (after I had had suspicions of my own about the likely hood that I was indeed NOT human and pretty sure I was something satyr like if not a satyr certainly) we were cleaning and found a pack of mugwort (an herb that can be used to treat depression, also used to repel nasty things [like our slimy roommate, whatever he was] as well as to see through the "dreaming" or "veil") my roommate (the kitchen witch) said "oh this is used to repel "elves" but the regions where its use as that originated "elves" was a generic term used to describe things which presence was undesirable, I asked "does it work on satyrs" (completely off handedly, I didn't even think before I said it, nor can I remember why it popped into my mind to ask, it was like a Freudian slip). He asks why and I turn to head upstairs saying "no reason, just curious" he pursues and begins asking twenty questions "do you know one?" "are your friends with one?" "are you one??" I feel something strange, like a twitching on my tail bone...he noticed it too and squealed in delight "YOU'RE A SATYR!!! Why didn't you tell me???" I explained that I wasn't entirely sure myself, but he could see my tail, my hooves, my horns, and my ears. Suddenly the epiphany as to why I had no reaction to his "human treats", and the fact that it explained SO MUCH of my personality and behavior (especially my personal

aversion to shoes and love of walking around bare foot). And that's how we became sure of my other kin nature.

(Do keep in mind that, back in Chapter 2, Lysander mentioned that he doesn't automatically accept any evidence of being 'kin. While other people can help verify one's suspicions in relatively objective settings, the word of others alone should not be taken as undeniable proof. More on this can be found in Chapter 9.)

As for fitting in, fey fare about as well as anyone else, though the fey who answered the survey seemed to mention higher occurrences of feeling not quite as comfortable in human society as some of the other respondents. sade describes her particular preferences:

I'm only so good at 'passing'. People who only know me on the most casual basis might not notice anything, but eventually something about me will galvanize reactions in people. The more normal or mundane an environment, situation, or person, the less well I'm likely to do, or the more they are likely to take an active dislike to me.

While she's uncomfortable at times, she's neither antisocial nor unable to function. Sarah, too, has found her own balance:

I feel comfortable in my body most of the time, but there are days when I want to shed my skin in the worst way, and I long to dance in ways that no human body ever could, and I feel my muscles strain against themselves, yearning to be free...Most "normal" people raise their eyebrows at me, my tattoo wings, my mindset, my ways of talking and interacting. Once they get over that, though, they pretty much accept me as I am and ignore my strangeness.

However, these and other examples are things often cited by some humans who are also dissatisfied with the world. Lysander's feelings could easily be stated by non-'kin of a more progressive persuasion:

Being an Otherkin effects my life in a very tremendous way. It effects [sic] who I socialize with, now that I know I am not human, socializing with regular humans (mundanes) I find rather boring, and dealing with them too often or in too large of doses is frustrating to me because they're just so, ugh, dull. (Not that all mudanes are dull, there are plenty who are loads of fun, and those who make quite agreeable, and occasionally pleasurable company. Simply the average mundane with whom I am required to interact with at work, or in the "real" world, are just so terribly dull, uninteresting).

Just as a side note, from the surveys I got, fey ended up reporting feeling "different" more than any other group. This doesn't mean that all fey

feel out of place, or that other types of Otherkin are better at adjusting. But it is one trend that I noticed as I was going through the surveys.

Traditional Lore vs. Modern Day Experience

Most elven and fey Otherkin say that the Seelie/Unseelie split is entirely of human creation:

If you read the various folklores concerning our peoples there has been a long tradition describing the division between the Light and the Dark Elfae, the Seelie and the Unseelie Courts. To ancient men there were two kinds of Elfae, those that seemed friendly, healing and helpful...and those that despised him, for invading the forests and seeking to destroy everything we loved, and were therefore hostile to man, played tricks on him or worse...there Is a grain of truth in this...There are those among us who have felt from the very beginning that we should fight mankind tooth and nail...There are those among us of a particularly discordant and chaotic inclination who...think that man is the true outsider and we should take him for everything he's worth...And then there are those who feel that healing, friendship and enlightenment are the only means...²⁵⁴

Erelin has another explanation:

I won't speak of light/dark. There are magical aspects to that, but they are pretty much the same as any other divide. I will, however, talk of Seelie and Unseelie...it isn't really light and dark so much as Creation and Destruction. And even then, it isn't 100%. Seelie builds upon itself. It encourages harmony. Think like a tree growing limbs. Each part serves a purpose. Each limb is a part of the whole. And the system encourages continuity. Not conformity, exactly. Each branch is different, but is made of essentially the same stuff.

For Unseelie... think Destruction. Not "Ravr, I smash stuff." But "If I collapse this part, this part may break apart too." Whereas the Seelie among the fae work to create new and greater things; the Unseelie test and break. They see what doesn't work. It isn't chaos, precisely. Think like the fire of a forge. That which enters the flame may stay the same, or it may warp, or it may burn, or evaporate, or reach some other fate. But it is tested. It isn't just a test, though: that which is lost to or warped by the flame is indeed lost or changed."²⁵⁵

Some elven and fey Otherkin report physical or energetic sensitivity to iron. Brendan, as mentioned above, seems to have inherited an allergic

²⁵⁴ Silver Elves, 2001, p. 58-59

²⁵⁵ Erelin, personal communication, August 24, 2006

reaction to iron. Kira reports that she had trouble handling the metal tools she used for woodworking, and that walking on iron grating on the street weakens her ankles to the point that for a short time she is markedly more susceptible to injury. CUSM says "I'm not allergic to metal. Metal appears to be allergic to me. Never could wear chains, they break within days." Jarandhel explains his situation a little differently: "I was more reacting to the way iron grounds energy than to the substance itself. It's a very harsh grounding effect, as opposed to the feel of copper. Since then I've gotten much more comfortable working with it."²⁵⁶ Erelin, on the other hand, has a more dramatic reaction:

I have major problems with iron or steel that is very low grade. Hematite as well. High grade steel makes me feel a little itchy if I hold it for a long period, but low grade steel or pure iron really burns. My skin burns into a blackish powder and it hurts like hell. I have some tricks against it, but without those it completely and totally sucks.

*It also seems to block my magic to a small degree. Can't do magic with an iron cauldron, or an iron athame. Not without a trick or two involved.*²⁵⁷

Incidentally enough, sade also has trouble handling hematite, which is iron oxide.²⁵⁸ Malcolm finds that the less processed a piece of iron is, the worse effect it will have on him.²⁵⁹

Mela Atreides also brings up a possible explanation:

I've had to deal with a couple of fae who did not react well to ferrous sulfate tablets (iron.) I've seen diarrhea, vomiting, upset stomach, nausea, weak-feeling, and some rather strange aura reactions. I've even seen these reactions when the person already had dangerously low levels of iron, and taking a supplement should have helped them. Sometimes it intensified the symptoms of their iron deficiency...

I would also like to point out that overdose of iron-containing supplements is the #1 cause of accidental overdose. It is WAY too easy to get too much iron, and it is very possible that fae are particularly susceptible to a non-fatal overdose.

*I'd be interested to see some data on the iron content of fae blood, whether high or low, and some clinical tests on how they react to iron supplements.*²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Jarandhel Dreamsinger, personal communication, August 25, 2006

²⁵⁷ Erelin, personal communication, August 25, 2006

²⁵⁸ sade, personal communication, August 25, 2006

²⁵⁹ Malcom-Rannirl, personal communication, August 25, 2006

²⁶⁰ Mela Atreides, personal communication, August 25, 2006

On the other hand, there are elves and fey who seem to have no problem whatsoever. Janus brings up a particularly interesting point in his own case: "I'm a warrior. It would be pretty useless of me if I just passed out every time somebody waved an iron rod at me, wouldn't it?"²⁶¹

Regardless of whether elven and fey Otherkin resemble the myths or not, they are a sizable portion of the Otherkin community. They show the diversity that is inherent in all types of 'kin, and bring the denizens of legend and lore into our world today.

²⁶¹ Janus, personal communication, August 25, 2006

Chapter 6: Dragons, Gryphons and Other "Mythological" Animals

While therianthropy deals with animals native to the physical plane, there are Otherkin who identify as animals out of legend. Dragons are the most common, though gryphons and phoenixes are more rare members of the 'kin community. The survey responses roughly mirrored the proportion of these 'kin in the community, with dragons numbering higher than other types of mythological animal 'kin.

Dragons in Mythology

While most people are familiar with the vicious, fire-breathing European dragon, there's a wide variety of dragon lore from around the globe. From wise and playful Oriental dragons chasing pearls in the sky, to fearsome aquatic serpents in North America, dragons comprise a varied body of lore.

European dragon stories tend to be less than flattering. In these traditions, at least, dragons are seen as rather bestial, base creatures, violent and anything but lovable. A well-known dragon in Norse mythology was Fafnir, who began life as a human but who was transformed by murder and greed into a reptilian form. He was slain by Sigurd, who consumed the dragon's heart and thereby learned the speech of birds.²⁶² The Greek dragon Python was destroyed by the sun god Apollo early in the history of the Earth.²⁶³ Another famous Greek dragon, the nine-headed Hydra, was killed in Heracles' second labor.²⁶⁴

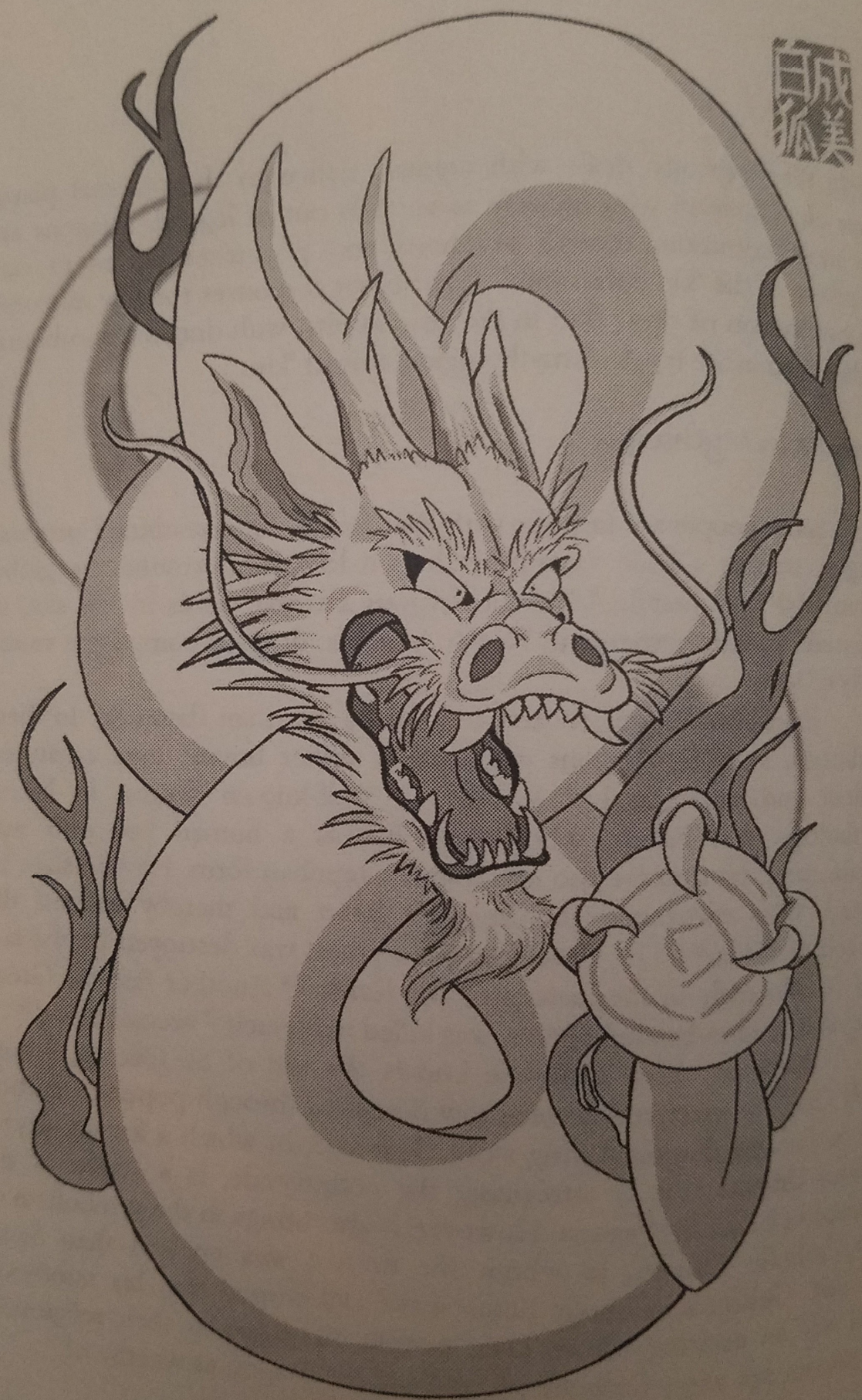
And just about everyone knows the tale of St. George, whose early Catholic martyrdom somehow morphed through popular tradition into a famous dragon-slaying story. This tale, in which a knight slays a vicious dragon that is terrorizing the countryside, is a staple of the European belief in dragons. However, it also brings in the symbolism of the Catholic Church, to whom the dragon was no less than Satan himself. George's symbolic defeat over evil earned him his sainthood and was an exciting tale to keep people interested in their religion.²⁶⁵ However, not every Catholic tale showed the dragon as worthy of

²⁶² Davidson, 1969, p. 101

²⁶³ Bulfinch, 1981, p. 27-28

²⁶⁴ Bulfinch, 1981, p. 119

²⁶⁵ Allen and Griffiths, 1979, p. 51-54



自成美

The Eastern dragon is a mythical animal. One represents people who satisfy—and win the legends of the Chinese dragon—sometimes they are greedy, but the Chinese dragon is also generous, bewitching, and may also be called the ruler of the Celestial realm.

Japanese
and the Indian
serpent-like tha
affinity for water

destruction. St. Simeon's dragon reminds us very much of the wolf of Gubbio, whom St. Francis of Assisi tamed. The dragon, who was wounded, approached St. Simeon and asked for forgiveness. This earned the dragon not only a pardon but also an instant healing of his wound. Once again, the wild beast that ravaged humanity was tamed, an allegory for Christian forgiveness of sins.²⁶⁶

The Eastern dragon, on the other hand, was a much different animal. One of the creatures of the Chinese Zodiac, the dragon represents people who tend to be content, but with great appetites to satisfy—and woe if those needs aren't fulfilled!²⁶⁷ This goes along with legends of the dragon being an intelligent animal, but very focused. Chinese dragons possess a pearl that they carry under their chin, but sometimes they are depicted chasing the pearl instead. Some interpret this as greed, though others see the dragons as playing with the pearls.²⁶⁸ Chinese dragons come in a variety of forms; while some are the typical sinuous, bewhiskered animal, others resemble carp or horses. Dragons may also be categorized by their bailiwicks; there are different dragons who rules over wind and rain, running water, hidden treasure, and the Celestial realm.

Japanese dragon lore seemed to be a hybrid of Chinese dragons and the Indian naga, carrying traits of both. Nagas were much more serpent-like than their draconic cousins, though they also had a similar affinity for water and shiny objects.²⁶⁹

Central and South American indigenous lore had a variety of dragon-like creatures. The plumed serpent, known as Quetzlcoatl to some Mesoamerican cultures, is one of the best known, though the double-headed draconic snake is also a common motif.²⁷⁰ North American dragons tended to be personified as lake monsters, similar to the Loch Ness monster. Many large bodies of water in North America are supposedly inhabited by huge plesiosaur-like beings that inspired draconic lore among indigenous cultures that lived nearby.²⁷¹

Modern mythology, particularly fantasy, loves dragons. The modern template for dragons springs from Smaug, the greedy, bestial dragon from Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Smaug hoarded valuable, sometimes magical, treasures, and was nearly invulnerable. Numerous fantasy novels featuring dragons have been published over the years. Anne

²⁶⁶ Allen and Griffiths, 1979, p. 55-56

²⁶⁷ Powers, 2000, p. 100-103

²⁶⁸ Allen and Griffiths, 1979, p. 36-37

²⁶⁹ Allen and Griffiths, 1979, p. 40-42

²⁷⁰ Allen and Griffiths, 1979, p. 57-59

²⁷¹ Allen and Griffiths, 1979, p. 60-65 and Clark, 1993, p. 209-215

McCaffrey's *Pern* series is probably the most well-known of these, featuring draconic animals that are ridden and directed by humans to defend their home from threats.

Movies also seem to prefer dragons in this tradition. As with novels, the movies sometimes portray dragons as helpful. The 1996 movie *Dragonheart* was quite sympathetic towards its main draconic character. 2002's *Reign of Fire*, on the other hand, showed a modern-day city under siege by predatory, fire-breathing dragons. *Eragon*, based on a popular young adult's novel written by a teenaged author, resembles the *Pern* mythos in that humans can bond with dragons that they ride. One rare occurrence of an Eastern dragon is in *Spirited Away/Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, a Japanese animation with a flying, wingless, serpentine dragon who shapeshifts to human form, and, true to old lore, is the spirit of a river.

Roleplaying and video games also feature dragons. *Dungeons and Dragons* is an obvious choice, though most fantasy-based RPGs have at least one draconic NPC (non-player character). They abound in the *Final Fantasy* games. *Kingdom Hearts*, which featured numerous Disney cartoon characters, brought back the evil queen's dragon form from *Sleeping Beauty*. And, once again, these are of the Smaug/Western dragon type, though Disney's *Mulan* and its incorporation into both *Kingdom Hearts* games features Mushu, a diminutive (and somewhat ridiculous) Eastern dragon.

Dragonkin

Like the ancient myths about dragons, dragonkin are highly varied in their experiences and self-descriptions. All of the draconic survey respondents had different interpretations of what dragons are and what it means to be a dragon. While the origin theories presented tended to mirror Otherkin in general, with past lives being the most common explanation and others being cited less often, the specific traits of each dragonkin's Other self were highly individualized, and no two dragonkin looked alike as dragons or came from the same place.

For some, being dragonkin arises from a spiritual connection rather than a specific lifetime. Havoc likens her draconic connection to the berserker phenomenon. Others see it as a hard-wired part of the person:

I believe it to be a fundamental attribute of my consciousness, a thing wired into my brain which is an inherent quality of my mind. I have always identified more closely with draconic things than with humans, and I have come to believe that this is because this fundamental archetype of the dragon more effectively represents my identity than

that of the human...I will not deny that I am human, but rather I believe that things like this, even if anomalous, are characteristics of the sentient mind. (Rexar)

Siege describes an unsure origin: "The dragon literally came down upon me in the form of a shining light that dropped into my body one night, and may have been from another world, though the images of home and prey that I sometimes received seemed fairly Earthlike - perhaps from an alternate Earth?" Sairen Min attributes her dragon self, not to a specific past life, but rather to the source of her soul itself: "I believe that my dragonic side tends to be a spiritual descendant upon my own soul line. As in, during the course of my soul's progress through time, the origin or beginning of my soul had a dragonic connection/ancestor."

Other dragons explain their 'kin sides through reincarnation. Many of them have detailed memories and have managed to reconstruct the settings and other details of these lives. While some aspects of these memories seem to be taken straight out of human mythology about dragons, other aspects are unique, even going into detailed biology and physiology.

As with other types of 'kin, it could be argued that human mythology derived from human interaction with "legendary" beings, and that only some of the information gained about these species remains in mythology today. This interaction need not necessarily be physical, either; it's possible that dragons came into human reality partially as a response to the continual presence of a great reptilian being in the collective unconscious, that has manifested as the Midgard Serpent, Python, and other huge reptiles of myth. This doesn't necessarily mean that dragons themselves were born out of this archetype, but rather that it offers a certain amount of communication between human reality and dragon reality. While this could be used to explain any number of mythological beings, dragons seem to be a particularly persistent guest in the human unconscious mind, and tales of giant serpentine beings span the globe.

Human attitudes toward dragons seem to reflect the cultures they come from. As noted previously, Western dragons were viewed as bestial, bloodthirsty killers by a group of cultures that were immersed in the Dark Ages and who tried to solve many of their problems through violence. Eastern dragons, conversely, spent much of their time among people as benevolent beings and bringers of rain and good luck. The Asian cultures that revered them, while far from pacifistic, still were more advanced in many ways than medieval Europeans. Then there is Python, the enormous snake killed by Apollo at Delphi; the Greeks, a highly rational society, explained away wondrous creatures and sought to capture and subdue them within the confines of stories in which even the gods were flawed. The Midgard serpent, who could crush the world

with the flexing of a few muscles, terrified the Norse, who predicted the end of the dragon during Ragnarok.

Perhaps the memories of dragonkin fill in the blanks. After all, human mythology only tells half the story. As with Otherkin in general, there must be some room for belief and speculation. Most of the survey respondents in general, dragons included, appeared to have spent quite a bit of time reviewing and thinking over their memories. While none of the dragons I surveyed had matching memories, keep in mind that just as human cultures vary widely, so may dragon cultures, particularly keeping in mind that all the dragons reported being sentient during their past lives. While the complexity of culture varied from highly solitary to centered around a council arrangement of government, no dragon reported a life of being completely dumb.

As is common among Otherkin, Awakening tends to be a gradual process. Expatriate began identifying as draconic in nature early on:

As a child I'd often pretend I was a "Dragon Knight"...This Dragon Knight character held almost the exact form of what I used to look like. Later in life I began martial arts and this lead [sic] on to a spiritual training which I undertook after reading some books on Chi. During one night of meditation I had a strong vision of my past life and it dawned on me just how similar it looked to my childhood character. I did at first consider the fact that it was me remembering my childhood character. After a couple of years of further spiritual training and doubting what it was I had the vision about, I finally managed to perform an astral projection and it was there, looking at myself...I realised all those things I thought I was just inventing as I went along were a tapping of memories that became more frequent as my spirituality grew stronger.

Teriel says that he's always known of himself as dragon. "It's just part of my nature...from the time that I practiced magic, I always thought of myself as dragon...I always had an affinity," he says.²⁷²

The majority of the 'kinselves of dragonkin tend to resemble the classic Western dragon, though the Eastern variety makes a less frequent appearance. Teriel, one of the latter, remembers being pretty close to the traditional Eastern depictions of dragons. He was sinuous and sleek, red with golden eyes and long whiskers, and had four claws on each foot. Havoc, on the other hand, describes herself as having "four limbs (two fore, two aft), one tail, and two wings. Very Western dragon." Siegf's description goes into some detail: "The physical traits of the dragon have been wings, tail, a heavy biting jaw, thighs longer than shins, neck flares which connected to the wings...a tendency to walk flat-footed but

²⁷² Teriel, personal correspondence. April 2006

also sometimes to run on the toes in order to snatch up and then carry off prey (suggesting a plains-based hunter who lives in nearby hills)".

Occasionally peculiar traits not normally found in dragon mythology will surface, such as fur or feathers—Tysha describes herself as a Western dragon, except with "two neck ridges, from ears to shoulders, and a mane of black hair". Raki doesn't seem to be so concerned about her appearance, which varies:

I consider my draconic side to be spiritual, not physical. I don't consider that 'virtual' physical characteristics have any spiritual significance, so the point is moot. The characteristics which have more significance for me relate more to senses, instincts and sensibilities.

Also, this changes over time, and each self-image usually forms an 'aspect' of its own. They all revolve around a basic draconic aspect of green Western dragon, though.

Anthropomorphic dragons are not unheard of, either. Expatriate describes himself as a sort of dragon-humanoid hybrid in appearance. His form from that life was a partially scaled biped with wings and a tail. He lived in a world also populated by more traditional dragons and sometimes formed connections with them.

Another trait often associated with dragons is flight. Wings tend to be the most common method of flying, and are very common among Western dragons. When asked about a comment he made about Eastern dragons having wings when very old, Teriel explains that it's primarily a mark of achievement, though nonwinged dragons also fly.²⁷³ K'hel, who resided close to the Gobi desert, reported having wings as a normal third pair of limbs. Wings were usually proportionate to the body, more or less; Ha Na says that her wing span was about twenty feet, while she stood about three feet high when on all fours.

While flight was primarily accomplished by wings, occasionally other forces are brought into play. K'hel describes a unique deviation from physical law: "Flight was via an innate 'gravity lens' effect which tended to lessen the effect of gravity directly below me. It's kind of like learning to wiggle your ears--once you got it, you got it, but until you feel it you can't really describe it easily." More esoterically, Teriel, speaking of his own kind, says, "We fly [without wings] because we are magical...the dragon form is the best way to manifest as physical."²⁷⁴

Dragons didn't just come in green. K'hel explains that a dragon's pigmentation is derived from the mineral content in his food, while Havoc never noticed her color as her vision tended to be primarily red-

²⁷³ Teriel, personal correspondence, April 2006

²⁷⁴ Teriel, personal correspondence, April 2006

tinted. Teriel's red color was simply a matter of genetics, as with melanin in human skin, not any sort of metaphysical or short-term environmental reason. Sunaseth reported that his red color had variable shading along his body; Salaiek Tuar'ann mentioned having prominent black markings around her eyes, as well as black wings, horns and claws on an otherwise silver body. And Siege describes his skin as a dragon as "gloriously colored hide mottled like the Painted Desert". Soreth's dragon self has "a single pure white scale set in the center of my chest. I have had that tattooed on my skin, in fact".

Other factors also vary in a dragon's physical description beyond appearance. K'hel and Teriel both say that their respective species were warm blooded egg layers, and Teriel mentioned that both parents cared for the eggs. K'hel's memories conclude that a dragon possessed very high body heat, though this does not explain the fire breathing trait associated with many dragons. To create flame, they "produced methane internally as do ruminants...Apparatus on the rear edge of the hard palate produced a spark". Sunaseth and his kin had horns which could be used to tell the age and health of the dragon that wore them.

As in mythology, dragonkin memories often show that they were quite large in their dragon forms. Teriel estimated his length at around eighteen feet, while K'hel mentions attaining a length of about thirty-five feet from end to end, and being one of the smaller of his kind. Sunaseth, on the other hand, was smaller, at about ten feet long, and Of Salfarro mentions that she was on the smaller end of the scale (no pun intended). Also in agreement with traditional lore, K'hel says that his expected lifespan in that life was measured in centuries. Similarly, Teriel reported living over a millennium.

Similarly to some elves, occasionally a person will describe himself as a dragon because it's the closest label to what they are. Kaijima is an example:

I identify with a physically non-human being that has many elements that are closer to a number of the mythological traits of dragons than another creature I might choose. Conceptually, my species is, itself, related to the archetype of "dragon"... The fact that I view myself as having an affinity for the draconic archetype would not differ much whatever I believed the specific details to be. My own personal experiences have led me to believe in a framework that includes spiritual transmigration and reincarnation, but I don't believe that those things would be required for me to say that I am "draconic".

Salaiek Tuar'ann also uses "dragon" to describe her species, though it's not the name they use for themselves: "I call myself a dragon'kin only for convenience, since dragon is the closest phenotype to my species. I am/was a Visviguin, which is like a small western dragon, except with

four wings and covered with soft-ish hide instead of scales. No breath weapon, either".

Sometimes it's not about the tangible description as it is the more abstract traits, as Rumor says:

I identify as a dragon, which is a bit of a lark because I'm not sure there are identifying characteristics for dragons. Scales? Wings? Fire breathing? There are dragons without any of these things. Beyond a quality of dragon-ness, where people know a dragon when they see it, they don't have much in common. I don't really identify dragons as a physical thing, but as a conceptual thing. They are something easily recognized, but difficult to describe. Pervasive, but difficult to pin down. Powerful, yet vulnerable. Animal, yet intelligent. Wise, but asocial. Solid, yet ephemeral... Me, having only a handful of traits that resonate on a deep level, I've approached the issue of what I look like as a dragon rather playfully. After a few years, I decided fate was not going to tell me what my Super Secret Dragon Identity was, so I decided I'd pick and choose physical features that make sense for me in building my internal representation of dragon.[emphasis mine]

Dragons also varied in sociability. Sunaseth reported that his species of dragon lived in family groups and were quite social. Tysha's society deliberately sent her here and seemed to be quite civilized in their own manner. Salaiek reports:

My culture was kind of primitive, I think. We didn't have a written language (that I knew of), but there was a spoken language. Some of the clans on the islands had agricultural knowledge, and we knew how to build things a bit. But yeah, Visvignin lived in clans, based on location. There were a few wandering clans who traveled around trading goods with the others, too.

Teriel, on the other hand, was solitary, which resembles the general assumption about all dragons in human mythology.²⁷⁵ While the majority of dragons who answered the survey reported being sentient, Of Salfarro mentions that her life as a dragon was much more animalistic.

Dragonkin rarely report having human bodies that resemble their 'kin side in appearance, though this isn't surprising given that dragons tend toward the reptilian. The dragonkin I have met in person, however, all tend to be on the lean-muscle side, evoking the sinuousness traditionally associated with their Other sides. Some dragonkin do report odd physiological quirks connected to their draconic selves. K'hel gives a detailed example:

²⁷⁵ Teriel, personal correspondence, August 26, 2006

I'm a space heater, and don't get cold easily. I overheat fairly easily...If I don't have animal protein at least every 3 days I become irritable...I eat 3K-4Kcal / day to maintain weight, 4,500 to gain at all, and at a sustained 3K I lose about a pound per day. My resting heart rate is approximately 100bpm, though my blood pressure stays at 120/80...I teach and train in Qigong, so my abnormally high metabolism and heart rate are somehow "right" for my body, even though Qigong emphasises conscious control of such functions. I am able to bring them down, but they are correct for me.

Teriel feels that his tendency towards dry skin resembles that of a reptilian dragon, if only in association. He also for a time deliberately trimmed his facial hair to resemble the cheek whiskers of his dragon self. And, like K'hel, he has a high metabolism leading to extra body heat and a particularly hearty appetite.²⁷⁶ Ha Na also has high metabolism, and additionally has trouble retaining body heat.

Just like Otherkin in general, dragons vary as to how comfortable they are in their bodies. Some are quite comfortable in human bodies, allowing it to be a vehicle for a nonhuman soul. Rexar seems to be quite well integrated:

I am a dragon. To me, this anatomy is a depiction of my consciousness and personality. It is a form to which I feel a natural, fundamental affinity, that which I would take if I could choose. I believe that this reflects who I am as a person; how I think, how I act, what I see in myself and the world around me...it is a truth I derive from my own mind, a measurement I make of myself. Hence, it feels right, feels like what I am, because that is what resides in my brain. That, to me, is a soul.

Kaijima says that being incarnated in a human body, but not identifying as human, gives him somewhat of a unique perspective:

It's difficult for me to single out any particular way in which being what I am affects my life because it is my life. I live in a culture engineered by human beings on a world populated by human beings; so as you might expect, I do a lot of the things any other human being does. I think that identifying myself as I do, has led me to desire a more objective look at human culture and practices that might be otherwise taken for granted.

Sunaseth, while being pretty well adjusted to human life, sometimes causes odd reactions in others:

²⁷⁶ Teriel, personal communication, August 26, 2006

Nearly everybody I meet calls me strange, (with varying degrees of dislike behind it, though) and teachers tend to say I'm a very bright individual. I've been called an indigo child by my aunt before (but I'm not sure how objectively true that is...). So people definitely sense something about me, but I've never had anyone guess with no outside clues that I'm an otherkin. And if animals sense anything about me, they have yet to show it.

Raki is rather comfortable as well, but admits to having some particular concerns that will always need to be addressed:

My draconity affects where I see myself going in the future. Not in the sense of having a career, but in the sense of living a certain lifestyle. There are certain needs I have, and things I need to manage, needs and things which I consider "draconic", which will probably be with me for the rest of my life. Although I don't see a career fulfilling any of those, having the time for certain activities is important to me.

For others, dysphoria may occur to one extent or another. Human bodies are very different from draconian forms, and dragonkin who identify more strongly with their life as a dragon may be quite uncomfortable in this life. Dragons, from the surveys I got, seem to report a proportionately high rate of phantom limbs, particularly those missing in a human body such as wings or a tail.

Tysba represents a unique case involving walking in. In her situation, she entered the body of a human named Tracey in 1991. This was done as a way for her to explore this reality and bring information about it back to her own world, Illyndra. What was supposed to be a temporary arrangement ended up becoming more permanent, and so she and Tracey needed to work out an arrangement. After spending several years learning, essentially, how to be human, Tysba opted to merge with Tracey:

I saw a natural therapist over in Kingswood who tried to get my soul out of this body so Tracey could reclaim it. Tracey didn't want it back so we never went for the second part of the treatment. Instead we looked for a way of merging our souls together and in October [2004?] we did... Since we merged I was feeling more Tracey than Tysba, but now I do feel both more-or-less equally, I have clearer human memories but I still have some strong memories of growing up in Illyndra. Some things I know I once knew have gone though, I can no longer communicate with Illyndra, I can no longer astral travel, I can't feel energy/magick anymore and the Illyndran language I once knew so well just looks like random words to me now. I almost recall being told they had to go but would come back in time, but I honestly don't know if I'm remembering that or if it's just wishful thinking.

One thing I have noticed in my personal observations is a strong correlation between dragons and cats. "Similar personalities," says Teriel. While there are doubtless dragons who aren't crazy about cats, of the half dozen I've met in person all of them have been cat lovers, though none have mentioned being feline therians. The independent streak is strong in a lot of dragonkin; Rexar describes the dragon mind as "confident, and strong of will; it is viciously protective of what it holds dear; it is shrewd, calculating, and clever; it is self-consistent and has an intense, powerful sort of personality."

unicorns and unicornkin

The classic unicorn is a white horse with a single, spiraling horn, and sometimes with cloven hooves, a lion's tail, and a fringed beard. This is primarily the European description, which also gives the unicorn immortality, the ability to neutralize poisons with hir horn, and sometimes physical asexuality. The Eastern ki'lin, on the other hand, is a little more draconic looking, and often is depicted with hir horn facing backward.

Most people's idea of the unicorn is one of purity, virginity, and innocence, backed up by hir attraction to human virgins. However, John Williamson's study of the medieval Unicorn Tapestries, in his book *The Oak King, the Holly King, and the Unicorn*, shows an older thread of lore. By studying contemporary culture in relation to the tapestries, as well as minute details in the flora and fauna woven into their patterns, Williamson shows that the hunting of the unicorn is actually more sex and fertility-based than one might expect (though the singular, phallic horn is rather a giveaway). In addition, it is shown that the motif of the Sacrificial King, such as that found within the tale of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, is also related to the unicorn, who is apparently not as innocent as initially thought! And unlike modern posters, statues, and My Little Ponies, unicorns of ancient myth were generally seen as dangerous beings, hence the complex processes necessary to capture one.

Unicorns, like dragons, are a staple of modern fantasy literature. Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* is a classic, and the movie based on the novel is quite popular. The sequel novel, *The Unicorn Sonata*, came out in 1996, and while it never gained the popularity of the original, it's a unique twist on urban fantasy. Meredith Ann Pierce's *Firebringer* trilogy features unicorns in a wide variety of colors living in herds, with unique spiritual rituals that resemble some neopagan rites of today. They also show up in works by Piers Anthony (*Apprentice Adept*), C.S Lewis (*The Chronicles of Narnia*), Anne McCaffrey (*Acorna*), and J.K. Rowling (*Harry Potter*). Two anthologies of short stories about unicorns were edited by

Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois; *Unicorns* in 1984, and *Unicorns II* in 1992. Beagle also edited two anthologies himself, under *The Immortal Unicorn* title. A rather obscure little anime unicorn, Unico, stars in two movies released in the United States, and Uni, another adorable baby unicorn, is found in the 1980s *Dungeons and Dragons* cartoon show. Shel Silverstein's song "The Unicorn" was performed by the Irish Rovers and told the story of how unicorns literally missed the boat when Noah's flood came.

Not a single one of my surveys was from a unicornkin, though I know they exist. (No jokes about my virginal status, please.) The only unicornkin-specific resource I found was one website, which includes a number of relevant resources including books, links and various writings. While a lot of it is personal testimony, it's definitely worth checking out²⁷⁷

Gryphons and Gryphonkin

Originating in Greek and Middle Eastern mythos, gryphons are a hybrid animal forms of the body of a lion, and the head and wings (and occasionally one pair of legs) of an eagle. Sometimes certain equine features, such as hooves or body, are added in. However, the lion + eagle formula seems to be pretty common.

Similarly to dragons, gryphons were known to guard gold and other valuables, protecting them from theft. Instead of eggs they laid agates²⁷⁸; however, if a male gryphon mated with a normal mare, the result was a hippogriff.²⁷⁹ Later lore stated that instead of arboreal nests, the eggs were laid in caves. Gryphons were considered solar animals, and were often depicted drawing the chariot of the Sun God. The gryphon was a popular animal in heraldry, representing qualities of both the lion and eagle.²⁸⁰

Outside of early mythology, gryphons are rather rare in literature. One makes an appearance in Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice in Wonderland*. In modern fantasy, they are best known from Mercedes Lackey's *Valdemar* novels, as well as Rowling's *Harry Potter* books. Meredith Ann Pierce's *Firebringer* trilogy has gryphons as antagonists. They make rare appearances in other novels, but haven't attained the popularity of dragons. They, like so many other mythical beasts, are among the non-player characters/monsters in *Dungeons and Dragons*. Gryphon is also a

²⁷⁷ <http://home.comcast.net/~uneairkagh/welcome.htm>

²⁷⁸ Bulfinch, 1981, p. 107

²⁷⁹ Spaid, 2006

²⁸⁰ Anonymous, 2006-E

totem in the *Werewolf: the Apocalypse* RPG, and the cover of the original *Changeling: the Dreaming* sourcebook features a gryphon in stained glass.

Balthazar, one of only three gryphon survey respondents, says that for him being gryphonkin is more of a totemic bond than due to a past life, though he admits the possibility of parallel or alternate lives. In fact, it seems that his gryphon side is a bit of an extension of his avian therianthropy, through which he identifies strongly with eagle and rooster energies, among several others. Saydee is similar, in that her gryphon is connected to being a bird therian, as is her sphinx aspect. Gryff Gradon, who also identifies as a centaur, has this theory about origins:

I believe the soul is the ultimate core of one's being. It controls our feelings and personality in their rawest forms. The soul is embodied in the spirit, which gives it form and determines what species with which the soul fits. The spirit, in turn, controls the mind and body. The spirit and body are usually the same species, and when they're not, the person is an otherkin.

This combination of traits may well be connected to (though not necessarily as a cause) his physical appearance, which he describes as including "a few avian-like traits: long arms, light build, prominent nose, deep-set intense eyes, and hair that often looks like a disheveled crest." Behavior-wise, he attributes his preference for outdoor work and dislike of confinement to being 'kin, though with the growth of his gryphon influence he finds himself being drawn to more populated areas. Griff says that he is not particularly comfortable in this life, either in body or environment, and that he is more comfortable around animals than people.

For Balthazar, Awakening was a process rather than an event. For him, each aspect of himself made itself known "precipitated by real-life changes and indicated to me through extremely vivid dreams", though he didn't indicate what those were. Griff, on the other hand, in searching for the reason why he felt different, ran across a description of Otherkin that resonated with him, though it took him a while to figure out what he was.

Phoenix and Phoenixkin

Traditionally, the phoenix is the lone of his kind, repeating a ritual of self-immolation and rebirth every 500 years. Ovid describes this bird as feeding only on scented plants and resins, such as those used for incense. At the end of five centuries, he builds a pyre of cassia, cinnamon, spikenard, and myrrh, and then immolates himself. From the

ashes rises the new phoenix who, as soon as he is old enough, inters the remains of his father within the temple of Hyperion. Once he has reached the end of his own half-millennium, it's his turn to commit sacred suicide, and so birth the next generation.²⁸¹ Birds that are similar to the phoenix are found in the mythologies of Russia (firebird), Japan (ho-oo), Egypt (bennu), China (feng) and Persia (Simurgh)²⁸²

Rythen Eugea, while not the only phoenixkin, was my only phoenix survey respondent. Her memories of her life as the fabled bird are scant, primary among them being her death at human hands. Her Awakening as a phoenix was a quick affair.

Meirya resonates with phoenix, but doesn't believe she ever was one, though she did think so at one point. Instead, these days she speculates that the phoenix may be more totemic for her, or related to the part of the soul known as the *ba* in Egyptian mythos. This is not surprising as she is a hawk therian, which for her relates to the *ka*, another part of one's soul.

An essay by kya_rayn goes into quite a bit of detail as to memories of being phoenix. The phoenix form manifests as a raptorlike golden bird, with the tips of the wings, tail and crest shading out to red. kya_rayn has had a lifelong attraction to birds of all sorts, but heavily questioned being phoenix at the first signs of Awakening out of the fear of being accused of attention-seeking.²⁸³

This doesn't completely cover those Otherkin who identify as mythological animals. Beyond dragons and gryphons, though, the population tends to be pretty scarce and quiet.



²⁸¹ Ovid, 1967, p. 345

²⁸² Benson, 1997

²⁸³ kya_rayn, 2006

Chapter 7: Other 'Kin

This chapter rounds up those Otherkin who just don't seem to fit in anywhere else. They tend to be rather small in number, though this doesn't make them any less worthy of mention. Angels and demons, while often depicted within Christian, Jewish, or (more rarely) Islamic imagery, also spring from other religions and cultures (and worlds!) as well. Kitsune are here simply because they're not quite like therians, but they're tied in enough with foxes that they don't exactly fit the mythological animal category, either. Mediakin are a singular phenomenon in the Otherkin world, basing their Other sides primarily on modern mythology, often through pop culture. And then there are the occasional 'kin who are one-of-a-kind or otherwise just don't fit in with any other group discussed here.

Angels, Demons, and Their Kin

Mention angels and demons to the average American and they're bound to think of lovely winged people in the Christian God's service, and terrifying monsters that work for Satan, tempt people into evil deeds, and possess the innocent. Much of this comes from modern monotheistic religions filtered through popular culture.

The Hebrew, and later Christian, conception of angels is what most people are familiar with. However, even the Hebrew angel lore was affected by that of Zoroastrianism.²⁸⁴ Angels weren't originally just wonderful, beautiful harp-playing beings who loved helping poor, wayward humans. The Cherubim who guarded Eden with a flaming sword after Adam and Eve left probably weren't the adorable little children of Raphael's painting. According to the book of Enoch, an apocryphal text, a group of angels, the Grigori, left heaven and mated with human women. The result was anything but heavenly—their offspring were huge giants, the Nephilim who destroyed everything within their reach.²⁸⁵

Angels also weren't always winged. In some early Hebrew depictions they appeared as very beautiful human beings—but no wings.²⁸⁶ However, in Exodus and other Old Testament books,

²⁸⁴ Pope, 2003

²⁸⁵ Charles (trans), 2003

²⁸⁶ Blau and Kohler, 2002

cherubim were described as being winged.²⁸⁷ Christian artists seem to have added the wings to later works to distinguish the spiritual angels from the fleshly humans—no word, though, if bells had anything to do with the angels getting their wings.²⁸⁸ Still, the wings stuck, and they've pretty much become a permanent part of angelic lore. The idea of each person having his own guardian angel is spread throughout biblical texts, particularly the book of Tobias. Later church authorities extrapolated on these ideas, as they often wrote their own interpretations of liturgical canon.²⁸⁹

Demons, too, were not necessarily quite as commonly imagined today. The word *daemon* comes from the Greek for “spirit” or “supernatural being”, usually with connotations resembling that of the *genius*, or an intermediary between humans and deities.²⁹⁰ Demons often had an ambiguous reputation with humanity, much like other spirits of nature. And, much like faeries, demons could be well-disposed towards humanity, or they could be harmful. It wasn't until Christianity firmly drew the line between “good” and “evil” that demons became, well, demonized. Anything that wasn't expressly within the Christian ideals of “good” were of the Devil, and demons were shunted into the role of Satan's little helpers. The dichotomy was furthered when the stories of the angels who rebelled against God, were defeated, and fell into the throes of demons became popularized.²⁹¹ Speaking of Satan, his name derives from the Arabic *shaitan*, which originally denoted a number of demons that had similar ambiguous roots to Hebrew demons.²⁹²

In the *Lesser Key of Solomon* (also known as the *Goetia*), a magical grimoire that supposedly dates back to the time of King Solomon (but is likely only a few hundred years old at most), focuses on the summoning of demons. As with its contemporaries in the genre, the book describes very formulaic methods of calling on these demons and what tasks they may perform for the magician. The summoning method is partially focused on trapping whatever entities are brought forth and then ordering them to perform whatever is desired, with threats given to avoid failure. Still, the role of the Goetic demons seems to be not quite so infernal (though many Christians would disagree) as practical. Divination, acquisition of wealth and knowledge, and conversation with the dead are common bailiwicks of Goetic demons. Given that the Church tended to see magic, particularly that for personal gain, as evil,

²⁸⁷ Exodus 25:20, Exodus 37:9, 1 Kings 6:27

²⁸⁸ Anonymous, 2006-A

²⁸⁹ Pope, 2003

²⁹⁰ Mish, 1993, p. 307

²⁹¹ Anonymous, 2006-C

²⁹² Mack and Mack, 1998, p. 151-153

coupled with the connotations of the word "demon", it's not surprising how the *Goetia* and similar grimoires received bad reputations.

Monotheistic beliefs don't have the monopoly on demons, however. Hinduism has its own collection of entities commonly referred to as demons. One type of Asura, known as Rakshasas, were once working in tandem with the gods to create an elixir that would bestow immortality. However, Vishnu intervened and distracted the Asuras so that the gods were the only ones who drank the elixir, thereby cheating the Asuras out of immortality. This, not surprisingly, created a permanent split between the two groups.²⁹³ There are a number of types of asura, though Rakshasas are particularly well known because of their role in the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*.

Christian-style angels and demons usually show up opposing each other in modern mythology. There's a very clear dichotomy, even if one group or the other isn't actually present in the story. Angels have been particularly popular among the New Age movement, where they occupy places next to the virtues of healing crystals, Indigo children, and other white-light material. Guardian angels especially have New Age fans, ironically taking over some of the roles of *genii* and other demonized spirits.

Demons, on the other hand, have their own popularity at the other end of the spectrum. Demonolatry (the worship of demons) and demonology (the study of demons) are popular among some occultists, particularly those who are as dark-and-scary as the New Agers are light-and-shiny. However, there are occultists who work with angels and demons alike in their older forms, drawing from texts such as the Book of Enoch and the *Goetia*.

Angels are often found among modern media, as is evidenced by the wildly popular 1994-2003 prime-time show *Touched by an Angel*, which as about as sugary-sweet as it gets. Every episode showed angels who came to Earth to guide good people to even more goodness, helping them out of tough situations and a happy, glowing ending to every one. However, demons get their due as well, particularly at the box office. Movies such as *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Ninth Gate*, and *Hellboy* (based on the Dark Horse comic) all feature demons either as characters or as important parts of the plotline. Sometimes, though, the dichotomy isn't so clear. Kevin Smith's *Dogma* is a satirical criticism of Catholic tradition that shows that sometimes "good" and "evil" are more blurred than is often thought. The same goes for the comic book movie *Constantine*, based on *Hellblazer*. In both movies, angels are depicted as not just holy beings, but also beings that can—and do—fall to temptation.

²⁹³ Mack and Mack, 1998, p. xxxiv - xxxv

Angels and demons also show up in comic books, though demons seem to be more popular. Some of the Vertigo line from DC comics, particularly those with more occult themes such as *Hellblazer* and *Books of Magic*, delves into the politics between Heaven and Hell, and how their respective denizens interact. The aforementioned *Hellboy* has, for a main character, a demon who was summoned to Earth and, through various twists and turns, remained here and works as a paranormal investigator. Marvel's *Ghost Rider*'s title character is a demon who possesses a human stuntman on a motorcycle. The latter two titles show the demons in a much more sympathetic light, anti-heroes rather than antagonists.

Games, both video and roleplaying, sometimes have demons as non-player characters. *Doom*, a series of first person shooters, has players destroying demons that have escaped Hell through interdimensional gateways. Demons also show up in fantasy-based RPGs such as *Dungeons and Dragons* and *Warcraft*. While not as popular as other White Wolf games, *Demon: the Fallen* continues in the tradition of allowing players to be the "monsters" rather than just fighting them.

The traditional mythology surrounding angels and demons is not so simple as usually assumed, particularly where Otherkin are concerned. While some may work along the popular good-evil dichotomy, there are a lot of grey areas, too, and even those for whom being angelic or demonic has nothing to do with human religions.

Angelkin have varied backgrounds. Violin Goddess, who is both elven and angelic and remembers her time in the Christian heaven, gives a hint at how different that experience was from this one:

As far as my angelic physical appearance, that is difficult. When I was an angel, I had no physical body. I was a spirit entity. So there were no physical characteristics. I was made of pure spirit. And so was everything else around me when I was in heaven. So the memories are more of feelings than of visual images.

Rene says that while she remembers some of her angelic past, it can be very difficult to translate into human understanding.

Angels weren't always ethereal, formless beings. For Melinda, being angelic was apparently a very mortal, though long-lived, affair:

I feel that I am an angelkin, but it is a different kind of angel. I had a corporal body. I was female...I was tall, pale with brilliant red curly hair and brown eyes. My wings were the palest blue as to almost seem white. There were others of my kind I believe too. We were messengers, working for a higher power, but we were not celestial. We lived long, but I do not remember dying per se... I have come to use the term "Fae Angel" because I was not a celestial angel. I was not a God's assistant. I was part of a race in that world or time. We were not just humans with wings, we were a magical

people... It was brought to my attention that "Angels are servants of God". I'll try to clarify a little more... I said I was not a God's assistant, and that's true. But I did serve... someone. I dunno who though, I can't remember anything about that. I don't know if it was a god, or another flesh being... I was in an army, and I fought for what I believed in. But I don't know who headed it up.

Though not universal, it is common for angelkin to report a connection with a higher power of some sort, as well as resonating with the role of guardian or warrior. Equally important to some, though, is the role as healer, which Melinda used to create a dualistic identity of "The Healing Warrior".

This balance of seeming opposites also shows up in Temperance+++’s self-description. He remembers life as an angelic hybrid known as Aasamir, a group that strongly displays angelic traits: "[We] have the ability to heal and help other souls, usually identified by and aura or halo around head, large feathered wings emerging from the back, long flowing hair, soft voice and features as well usually considered asexual, gravitate towards armor both symbolically and spiritually, uses sword as symbolic weapon (imagine images of Michael the Archangel with armor and flaming sword)." He balances out his own recollections with advice and readings "from many other psychics that have intuitively come to similar conclusions about me being connected to medieval energies and knighthood. This is the only way I have been able to dismiss the notion that I am making up this history".

For others, the time in a mortal body is at odds with the time as an angel. CUSM’s angelic heritage seems to be the much-hyped "fall", though he has more of a matter-of-fact feeling on it rather than the attitude of "I'm fallen and that makes me different and misunderstood" that often gets tossed about. Of his final memories of that episode of his existence, he says, "I get the sense of Arabic behind it, but without detail. I know I left the Golden City with others, fleeing or escaping for some reason, and felt His eyes on my back as we melted away, knowing he could destroy me at any time but did not. I broke some rules to get here, is my feeling on it. I suspect I classify among the Djinn for it, all said and done, and rationalize today that I'm just slumming it down here."

Tieriel describes his own conception of being an angel as one not tethered to any deity or higher form, but living an independent, somewhat mercenary lifestyle. Manifestations on the physical plane tended to resemble the common imagery of lovely winged human; however, he didn't possess any one native form. As with his draconic life, he was not limited solely to the physical plane and ranged widely across multiple levels of reality. He was of a type of angel that would

essentially exchange miracles for belief, belief being a power in and of itself.²⁹⁴

On a side tangent, this is not far from the idea that deities and other supernatural entities depend on human belief for strength. There is a concept, particularly among some occultists, that belief is energy in and of itself, and that deities, spirits and other entities rely on belief for their very existence, or at least their power to be anything beyond a ripple in the Cosmic pattern. When a magician creates a servitor or egregore (thought forms of varying power and ability) there is a certain amount of belief that goes into their creation—the magician believes that that entity exists and can do all the things it is supposed to do. This agrees with the idea that humans create their deities in their own image, and give them life through belief.

Terry Pratchett, in his novel *Small Gods*, illustrates this perfectly through his satire of organized religion. The small gods are those who have no believers; they whirl about in the desert, craving belief to give them strength to remember what they once were. And yet that belief shapes them:

God needed people. Belief was the food of the gods. But they also needed a shape. Gods became what people believed they ought to be. So the Goddess of Wisdom carried a penguin...one bad sculptor who had only ever had an owl described to him makes a mess of a statue, belief steps in, next thing you know the Goddess of Wisdom is lumbered with a bird that wears evening dress the whole time and smells of fish (his emphasis).²⁹⁵

Not all angels believe they came from traditional reincarnation. Palmer has this to say about her own identity: “. It is, to some degree, realized through my personality. But truthfully, my social-personality is a lot more watered-down than my true inner-self. Or maybe my inner-self is my social-self amplified”. She points primarily to personality characteristics that, to her, resonate with the idea of “angel” and finds that the archetype suits her well. She also reports frequent manifestations of phantom wings.

One trend did make itself known among my angelic survey respondents. Palmer reports that being an angel doesn't really affect her life beyond being an influence on her choice to become a social worker. She says that occasionally people may notice that there's something a little different about her, but she seems pretty happy with this life overall. Melinda, on the other hand, says that “Well, I'm not always comfortable in this body... sometimes it feels like having to go to the

²⁹⁴ Teriel, personal communication, April 2006

²⁹⁵ Pratchett, 1992, p. 223

bathroom or eat is such an inconvenience, and I think that's a layover". However, like Palmer, her angelic heritage led her to a career in healing, specifically veterinary work. Temperance+++ shows this angelic tendency towards devotion to helping others:

I am subconsciously perusing work like tarot reading, spirit art, faith healing and ghost hunting, thereby putting me in direct conflict with unclean spirits that I feel I wish to banish or rid people of... Similarly I feel I am pursuing this line of work to help people heal or send disembodied spirits into the light... People and animals seem to instinctively trust me... I try to socialize with "light workers" but seem to attract needy, unbalanced people, who often think I have some way of helping them. I in turn feel I have an obligation to them, and never turn them away, even though I am often warned to avoid interaction with those people.

Violin Goddess, too, has chosen to pursue a career in counseling and therapy. Teriel is an energy worker and healer. While this is a common trend among angels, it should not be assumed that all angels choose vocations that involve helping others.

As with angels, most people (at least in America) when asked to describe a demon, automatically revert to popular Christian-based imagery and mythology. However, the experience of demons themselves varies quite a bit. Raethyn Sarachael says, "In my previous incarnation, I was a loosely connected blob of energy that looked like an amorphous shadow. I could shapeshift into all sorts of forms, but could not feel physical pain, hot, cold, stuff like that". However, she doesn't accept these memories without verification:

As for discerning memories from imagination.... I have had numerous shared memories with other demonkin that, while not identical, are close enough to be beyond coincidence. This is the only real way I can verify them. Otherwise, most of my memories come to me through my dreaming state. I normally have precise control over my dreams. I can control them. I don't control my memories, obviously, so that lack of control usually helps me figure it out a bit.

My "official" Awakening was about a year ago. The beginning of it was technically 3-4 years ago, although I've always felt I wasn't entirely human. I constantly doubt the validity of my claims. I like to have concrete proof or firsthand experience with things before I completely believe them, and even then, I'm unsure. So, yes, constant doubt. I've never denied that I wasn't completely human to myself, though I have done so to others.

Rather than seeing her demon self as just an imprint from a previous life, Raethyn says that she is a demon in human flesh, and when she dies

will remain a demon. She says that being a demon doesn't really affect her life much; the few people she has come out of the 'kin closet to have been pretty accepting—she tends to only tell those she's reasonably sure will understand.

Eko has decent memories of her existence as a demon, including that she chose to incarnate as human for a purpose, though she hasn't entirely figured it out yet. She describes her memories as "consistent", and says that they match up well with the memories of others, though she says that she and her fiancé in particular will question each other's memories to be sure they're solid. Eko says she never really Awakened in a sudden sense; the Other side of herself has always been there. It is a more or less integrated part of her and her life.

The word "demon" sometimes gets applied by human mythos to entities who don't perceive themselves to be particularly demonic. In Hindu mythology, the words Rakshasa and demon are often interchanged to refer to beings who are at constant war with the Hindu pantheon.²⁹⁶ Gesigewigu's describes Rakshasa (both the singular and plural of the name) as simply being who and what they are meant to be in their own cosmology:

We worked in a culture that was highly ritualized and noble (that of the Brahma-Loka, or the "Heaven" of the Hindu Paradigm), but that was just where we worked. We had our own Loka (plane... We had a very honour based pseudo-culture that we wore to work (we were the Guardian/Watchers), but that didn't hold much sway outside of Brahma-Loka... Because I'm Rakshasa, I tend to be different in my views around things like darkness, destruction and things along those lines, and that makes my style of practice sometimes seem "dark" to some people. My focus in Metaphysics deals with Death/Bardo/Rebirth, and the anatomy of the Energetic Body. I think both those points can be traced back to being a Rakshasa, a Shapeshifter who used to kill and die for a living, and pass between lives without losing anything, memory, skill, property or otherwise.

While Rakshasa are fundamentally formless, in that they don't have any shape they return to, they do often have general patterns they choose to stick with between forms. Gesigewigu's mentions the popularity of black, blue, and green, either on skin or accoutrements (which does echo many Hindu images of Rakshasa). He also mentions that they are generally sexless (physically, anyway) "until we were Mating, and we would battle to be the de facto male, and only then would Rakshasa have a phallus or a yoni."

He mentions a series of lives, but in all of these he has retained his primary identity:

²⁹⁶ Wangu, 1991, p. 45

I believe I am Rakshasa, because my Soul is Rakshasa. While I have had past lives as Rakshasa, I've had them as humans and elves too, but I'm not human or elf, because my Soul is Rakshasa. It's not a past life lay-over, my Soul was created as a Rakshasa, and independent of any reincarnation, that is what it shall be.

Sometimes people use the term demon because it's the closest term that describes them, something we've seen in other types of 'kin. Eko describes herself as:

...maybe demonic. But if I were to call it that I can't say in the sense someone would think of a demon as. Definately not evil or anything... Maybe they're only unique to me but I had wings (bony like a bat or dragon), a tail, and boney spikes on my shoulders and back but overall I stood and looked very human.

Kitsune

Kitsune are fox spirits found in Japanese, Chinese and Korean lore. These aren't just fox therianthropes. Rather, kitsune have a unique body of lore that surrounds them and defines them apart from other vulpines.

Fox lore in the aforementioned countries is very strong, particularly in Japan, which has a particularly strong historical fox cult. According to one document, there are over twenty different terms for specific types of nonphysical foxes, from Reiko ("supernatural fox") to Kyubi-no-kitsune ("nine-tailed fox") to Koryo ("haunting fox"). Some of these names, including Kuko ("air fox") and Tenko ("celestial fox") are also reminiscent of other beings in Japanese lore, such as the tengu, aerial goblins. Others refer to specific foxes, such as Myobu ("court lady") and Tome ("old woman"), which are specific to Mt. Inari. Kotai refers to a "regiment" of foxes, which may be made up of Yako ("field fox"), Yorikata ("assistants") and a Shuryo ("chief"). Kitsune itself simply means "fox".²⁹⁷ The word apparently comes from a combination of "kitsu", which is the sound a fox makes, and "ne" signifies affection for something, which is not surprising considering the wide body of lore surrounding foxes.²⁹⁸

Historically, kitsune were sometimes depicted as being "at odds" with Inari, the Japanese god of foxes and rice. This may be compared to the dichotomy of light/Seelie and dark/Unseelie fey and elves. Inari and

²⁹⁷ Buchanan, unknown

²⁹⁸ Nozaki, unknown-A

白狐
成美



his (or her) attendant white foxes are often seen as the “good” ones, while the more mischievous kitsune-tricksters can be compared to the “dark” fey/elves. It seems to be primarily a human categorization depending upon how the different foxes treat humanity.²⁹⁹

While kitsune naturally take the shape of ordinary foxes, they are well known for their shapeshifting abilities. Many tales of kitsune describe how they take the form of human women to seduce unwitting men, which was often a fatal encounter for the hapless victim. As I mentioned in the vampire chapter, this does include a form of psychic (or occasionally sanguine/physical) vampirism on the part of the kitsune, who feeds from the man until he wastes away.³⁰⁰ The transformation would often occur through a rite in which the kitsune placed certain plants or a human skull on his head.³⁰¹ There are tales, too, of people being invited into a party of strangers for an evening, only to awaken surrounded by foxes. Again, this mirrors the European fey lore, in which travelers were led astray by the Good (or not so Good) Folk for a prank—or worse. While men are the usual targets, women may be possessed by a specific fox spirit, the kitsune-tsuki. This is sometimes tied to possession by Inari or the Chinese fox fairy, which is very similar, if not identical, to kitsune. The kitsune-tsuki is said to use the breast or fingernails as portals into the victim’s body, and the effect is similar to disassociative identity disorder in that two markedly different, imbalanced personalities are observed, often in much distress.³⁰²

Kitsune are rather rare in pop culture, especially outside of Japanese animation and manga. Mercedes Lackey has a couple of kitsune characters, though as with most of her characters she tends to take liberties with traditional lore, embellishing kitsune culture and behavior to better fit her storylines. However, most pop culture kitsune are from anime and manga. These include kitsune or related characters from *Naruto*, *Angel Tails (Tenshi no Shippo)*, *Tactics*, and even several *Pokemon* inspired by kitsune, including Vulpix and Ninetails. The *Pokemon* spinoff, *Digimon*, also has a pseudo-kitsune named Renamon. Kitsune and their ilk also show up in video games, usually those of Japanese creation. Along with the *Pokemon* games, this also includes the *Sonic the Hedgehog* series, a couple of the *Megaman* games, and some of the later *Legend of Zelda* games.

Kitsune show up in random other places. White Wolf features them in their Werewolf offshoot, *Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East*. They

²⁹⁹ Hearn, unknown

³⁰⁰ Mack and Mack, 1998, p. 128-129

³⁰¹ Nozaki, unknown-B

³⁰² Mack and Mack, 1998, p. 244-245

also show up on a few *Magic: the Gathering* cards, as well as in one issue of DC Vertigo's *The Sandman*, written by Neil Gaiman.

Kitsune are an odd group. I don't mean this personally, but rather in a categorical sense. They aren't therians, but they can shift (as do some other nontherian Otherkin), and they are foxes, albeit supernatural ones. One of the main characteristics that distinguish kitsune from fox therians is that kitsune identify strongly with the body of mythology surrounding these Asian fox-spirits, rather than being an ordinary fox.

Another factor that separates kitsune from fox therians is the appearance of the kitsune self. The most well-known feature is the presence of multiple tails. Traditionally a kitsune earns a tail for every 100 years lived. Obviously this isn't a literal thing, given that Otherkin have the same average life span as anyone in a human body. The twins, Solo and Duo, compare the gaining of tails to the same sort of conscious spiritual evolution as Western alchemy.³⁰³ Tails aren't the only difference, though. Solo explains, "Size, bone and facial structure seems to vary from common foxes...think of elves versus humans and you can get an understanding here a bit."

There is a high rate of reincarnation origins among kitsune, though it doesn't explain every kitsune. Given the human mythos of kitsune "possessing" people, this isn't surprising. While this possession was considered to be a temporary, albeit negative, occurrence, it does leave the door open to the idea of kitsune spirits being able to inhabit physical bodies on a more long-term basis. In fact, Solo and Duo make an excellent point in this regard: "We do have snatches and snippets of memories of multiple past lives, though with us we see it mostly as an issue of jumping from body-to-body. Regardless of incarnation, we're still *reiko*, at least in spirit." An anonymous kitsune adds, "I do have shared memories with others, most often with Solo and Duo, mostly because we've spent a lot of shared time together on turns around [the wheel of reincarnation]...Some shared memories haven't been consistent but in a way that I wonder if I've lived the same life over again and just made a few different decisions that ended up changing outcomes." As for Awakening to these memories, kitsune are fairly typical in reporting a general tendency towards gradual processes.

Incarnating into a human body affects the kitsune, physically and otherwise, in various ways. The anonymous kitsune relates that her experience has been primarily a human one and that she's simply a continuation of who she was in other lives. Criofan's only complaint seems to be a bit of body dysphoria centered on the human arms and legs being put together differently than a fox's limbs. Solo reports a

number of traits that he and his brother possess in which the kitsune affects the human to one degree or another:

Insofar as present body reflecting these traits, we have had people compliment on how 'fox-like' we look, and generally we're either compared to a canid or a cat insofar as look and mannerisms. Our eyes are dark brown, but they've been known to turn amber and develop yellow rings around the irises. We're also built lightweight, weighing about 100 lbs and standing at about five feet, lean and very active. In addition we look very young for our age, and are commonly mistaken for a kid of fourteen to sixteen... There have been times where we've caught a sound and felt our ears swivel and rotate in a way that human ears aren't supposed to... [we] howl and growl and do a vast variety of other things that 'normal' humans don't do. We still walk up the steps on all-fours. We still make nests, and occasionally hoard food. Our hoarding used to be particularly bad in childhood, as our mother would spend almost every weekend cleaning out caches of food from under furniture, tucked beneath mattresses, stashed in rips in clothing or in pockets, under beds, etc.

Phantom limbs are also a frequent occurrence among kitsune. Tails are particularly common; Criofan describes a fairly common experience with children noticing phantom tails: "As far as animals or other people noticing goes I have on occasion noticed small kids looking at me strangely and if I'm feeling my tails I'll wag them and that sometimes gets a smile." Solo tells of one of Duo's experiences with tails:

One time my brother was in a Korean-owned dollar store and was chased out by an elderly Korean woman who followed him all over the store pointing at his ass and speaking entirely in Korean. He bid a hasty retreat. Now, if we were dressed oddly there would be some sort of reason for some reaction, if it wasn't for the fact that we were either in work-attire, or t-shirt and jeans when [this] occurred.

However, this seems to be the extent of the weirdness for most kitsune who answered surveys. The anonymous kitsune simply accepts that she is in the here and now, and that she is a different person from when she was kitsune, much like we are different in ways from who we were five years ago. Criofan describes the effect being kitsune has on his life as being about equal with the impact his eye color has.

Many Kitsune honor Inari, the Japanese fox deity who guards over rice crops. Inari is not himself a fox, but is associated with them. Solo elaborates:

[I]f people saw foxes hunting in the fields, they knew the fields were fertile if the rodents and other vermin were feeding off the grain. Therefore foxes also became

associated with fertility. If you happen to look at the tail of a shrine fox, it resembles a phallus with the sacred jewel mounted on top, giving it multiple meanings.³⁰⁴

For Criofan, Inari was a crucial part of his Awakening. Dreams in which he would shift to a human-fox hybrid led him to begin researching fox-specific shapeshifter lore. As he began studying kitsune and related mythos, Inari came to him and explained how the lore applied to him. He still questions himself, but continues to come up with the same conclusion—that he is kitsune.

Sometimes worship of Inari is something the kitsune was already doing prior to Awakening. Naryu is a good example:

I worship Inari-sama because Inari-sama comes to me... Just as Amaterasu did.. Before I ever awakened to the concept of otherkin I was working with those deities. As I began to delve into my own identity and futher my knowledge, my bond with Inari became stronger--and I remembered certain aspects of said past life.³⁰⁵

Some kitsune also adopt Shinto, Buddhism, or other religious practices found in kitsune-prone areas. Shinto is particularly attached to the fox cult in Japan. However, kitsune follow a variety of religions. Criofan practices Celtic paganism, and says that he would do so whether or not he was kitsune. In addition, neither Solo nor Duo practice Shinto, though they are quite well-informed on Inari-related lore.

Otakukin/Mediakin

This is a rather controversial topic with strong feelings on both sides. Otakukin (alternately Otakin) are people who resonate strongly with certain characters or species from Japanese anime and manga. They are a subset of Mediakin, those who identify with beings from movies, books and other media, though anime and manga tend to be the most common influences. I only received a couple of surveys from Mediakin, though I have met a few in person and online.

This seems to be a topic over which people tend to be solidly on one side of the fence or the other. Even many Otherkin think that Mediakin are taking the concept entirely too far. The Mediakin, of course, have their own arguments defending their identities, which brings up a lot of questions about the definition of Otherkin in general.

At first glance, Mediakin seem to be an impossibility. They align themselves with fictional characters that have only recently come into existence, often long after the Mediakin themselves were born. This

³⁰⁴ Solo, personal communication, August 28, 2006

³⁰⁵ Naryu, personal communication, August 28, 2006

pretty much negates the traditional reincarnation theory that takes a strict linear viewpoint of time. It's also argued that since the worlds that Mediakin's other sides come from are perceived as being created by writers and artists that they exist solely as fiction.

Then there's the fact that a sizable portion of Mediakin identify with a particular character rather than a species, as with Otherkin. Toutha de Danaan 'kin rarely say they're specific Celtic deities reincarnated, for example. Instead they have their own unique identities, which make their claims more believable than saying they're all Danu incarnate. This argument comes down to definition. Does being 'kin of any sort require that you have to have your own identity rather than adopting an established identity? Are you less 'kin if you claim to be Legolas from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy than an elf who identifies as one of the Elenan? Is resonance alone proof enough of being 'kin? Furthermore, what happens when you get five different people claiming to be Akira in the same room? And why are there so many Sephiroths, but not a single person claiming to be Bugs Bunny?

It may be argued by some that those who identify as particular characters are actually invoking those characters, which would explain why there can be several Akiras all at once. If deities and spirits could only respond to one invocation, then only one Catholic Mass per Sunday, and only one Wiccan ritual per Sabbat, would be duly blessed. In every Mass held at the same time on Sunday, the same Jesus Christ is invoked; the same goes for numerous deities called upon by Wiccans. Somehow, it is believed that these divinities are present in every single invocation of them, even those that happen simultaneously. Invocation then means that numerous people can be invoking the same character at once. Numerous modern magicians have successfully worked with modern mythology in magic, particularly Ellwood, whose book *Pop Culture Magick* goes into great detail about pop culture icons and magic, invocation included. Cosplay, which involves dressing as a character and then acting out a story as that character, can be considered a form of invocation, though not all people see the magical aspects of it. The invocation theory also leaves out reincarnation, which seems even more questionable when it involves literal interpretations of "fictional" characters. This is why I recommend that Otherkin in general, but Mediakin specifically, explore possibilities beyond reincarnation which may fit their situation more smoothly.

In addition, not all Mediakin consider literal reincarnation to be their origin. One well-developed website on the topic says that: "Many Otas [Otakukin] simply find a certain anime to be hauntingly familiar in some way, like a house you moved out of when you were three. Some Otas believe that a certain anime is merely their spiritual home, where they 'should' have been born, or that they lived there in a past life but

were someone inconsequential to the plot of that anime",³⁰⁶ One of my few Mediakin respondents, who identifies as Tsusuka from *back//SIGN*, an anime show, claimed "soul transmigration" as an origin.

Another accusation made about Mediakin is that they discover a character and then change their behavior in order to emulate that character. This happens commonly among other Otherkin though. While Otherkin (other than Mediakin) generally don't identify as specific characters or entities, it's common for newbies who really, really want to be a dragon or an elf to attribute every piece of their personality to being Other, and then change their personality to match it better. It's also common among totemism—the person who has a Sparrow or Toad totem may be in such denial that s/he tries really hard to be like the Panther s/he thinks her totem really is. In the same way, some accuse Mediakin of being fans who want to be like a given character so much that they say they are that character and do everything they can to be like hir, whether they really resemble hir or not. There's not the lifelong fascination with an archetype or animal that later on reveals itself to be a hint at one's inherent nature; rather, it seems as though Mediakin (and others) are simply latching on to whatever seems cool. It remains to be seen what will happen once the anime fad in the United States (where most Mediakin seem to be) wears off—but then again, we can say the same for Otherkin in general. There will always be those who jump onto the bandwagon, regardless of what it's carrying.

Some people look askance at Mediakin who "remember" nothing of their lives except what is presented through the available media. Indie makes an excellent observation: "I usually call B.S. on someone who: Has one, and only one, interpretation of their story and will not consider alternatives. An example would be some of the otakin I've seen who spend much more time on believing the literal interpretation than exploring other alternatives (such as truth being interpreted through a filter that means a lot to *that* particular individual or wishful thinking or playing out dramas in the head that are say cathartic or help the person sort things out)".³⁰⁷

Duo says, on language: "I'd tend to give the hairy eyeball to someone who claimed, for example, to be otakuin of a German character in an anime and yet run around babbling in broken fan-Japanese. I've seen something like this happen before and it always confused me a bit, why they would automatically target the language of the media-creators, and not the original language of the characters they

³⁰⁶ Anonymous, unknown-C

³⁰⁷ Indie, personal communication, August 13, 2006

claim connection to."³⁰⁸ So it would appear that inconsistencies can seriously challenge the legitimacy of Mediakin in some eyes.

There are a number of points that can be taken as support of Mediakin. While Mediakin are notorious for supposedly picking only certain characters/species to be, the same could be said for Otherkin. There are a lot more elves and dragons than trolls and basilisks out there, after all. In fact, most, if not all, of the arguments against Mediakin can also be aimed in slightly altered forms towards Otherkin in general. In addition, not all Mediakin are character-centric; some resonate more with a general species found in a particular show or book.

While the feasibility of past lives is often used as proof that Mediakin can't exist, reincarnation doesn't necessarily have to be chronological. If time is viewed from a nonlinear viewpoint, then it is entirely possible to have lives "out of order". Furthermore, if reality is infinite, then all the "fictional" worlds really do exist somewhere; as mentioned in the theory of Soulbonding, it's possible that what we see as fiction is channeled alternate, nonlinear reality. Just as most Otherkin resonate with beings in ancient mythology, so do Mediakin resonate with beings in modern mythology. Myths and legend are just the pop culture of the past, and some of today's pop culture will develop into mythology as time goes on. It could be, too, that Mediakin are vehicles of evolution for modern mythology, the storytellers who develop existing myths further for the cultures they inhabit. As I have discussed a number of times, myth is not a dead, static thing, but a living tradition that is constantly growing and changing. If we look at Graham's idea that archetypes in mythology enter into this world through some of its inhabitants, then Mediakin are simply the vehicles for today's mythology.

Admittedly, there are times when people appear to turn the existing material on a certain character inside out—for instance, Sephiroth (of *Final Fantasy VII* fame) is best known as a one-winged angelic villain dead set on world destruction. However, there is at least one woman who claims to have astrally married Sephiroth, insists that he's really a nice guy, and that he loves her more than all of the other fangirls who claim to love him dearly (and who apparently are lesser in their devotion than she). This flies right in the face of the rest of the body of lore surrounding that particular character. To most people, this would be akin to saying that Jehovah supports polytheism, or that Kali is a sweet, bubbly kind of gal who would never harm a hair on anyone's head.

Many Mediakin at least resemble their Other sides personality-wise, if they don't end up going in the opposite direction of being absolutely fundamentalist about what is or isn't true about them. Those

who elaborate on the existing media generally tend to remain at least somewhat true to those depictions. Of course, for all we know, Sephiroth could have gotten a bad rap, since history is written by the victor, and since our only depiction of him is via the *Final Fantasy* game, maybe there's more to the story. Still, given the evidence at hand, someone who remembers Sephiroth as a vicious killer is more likely to be taken seriously than someone who describes him as loving and caring.

Tsusuka brings up the point that there really isn't that much difference between believing you're a fictional character from modern media, and an elf or dragon. It's not a huge step to offer modern gods and beings the same internal connection as older ones. In fact, many characters in pop culture are simply new interpretations of old archetypes; for example, compare San from *Mononoke Hime* with Artemis, Diana or any number of maiden huntress goddesses. Ellwood, in *Inner Alchemy*, describes one of his early experiments in which he worked with the five elements (Earth, Air, Fire, Water, Spirit) personified by characters from the anime *Cowboy Bebop*.³⁰⁹ The faces and names may change, but the energy remains the same.

Finally, while some argue that Mediakin haven't been around long enough to prove they aren't a fad, the same could be said of Otherkin. What this all boils down to—once again—is that identity is a very personal thing, and that nobody can really determine anyone's identity but hir own. This is why it is crucial to take the time and effort to examine yourself and test your proof over and over again regardless of what sort of 'kin you are.³¹⁰

"One-of-a-kind" and Other Unique Otherkin

Occasionally you'll run across Otherkin who don't really describe themselves as being anything we're familiar with—maybe not literally one-of-a-kind, but the only one they (and I) have heard of. Given the possible permutations of life in a nearly (or wholly) infinite Universe/Multiverse, this isn't surprising. After all, in the words of the Bard in the first act of *Hamlet*, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio/Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." Oftentimes these 'kin resemble more well-known entities, but maintain that they are not the same.

³⁰⁹ Ellwood, 2007, 139-141. Mediakin may also be interested in his book, *Pop Culture Magick* (Immanion Press, 2004), which deals with characters from pop culture such as anime as independent entities.

³¹⁰ For more information on Mediakin, <http://otakukin.atspace.com/> is a great starting point.

Briana is one such person. She describes a life as a sort of sea serpent, though she doesn't connect the species to plesiosaurs, dragons, Nessie, or any other similar beings. In that life, she was "large, thick-bodied, dark in color, have/had a smooth thick hide (like a dolphin, maybe), with many fins and at least one set of limbs." A carnivorous animal, her diet consisted of various animals that coexisted in the deeper realms of the sea where she lived.

Briana's seafaring self only resembles Nessie in some ways, but cryptozoological beings occasionally surface within the Otherkin community. Tala el'Shiharan has several 'kin sides, one of which is a chupacabra. Her experience is quite vivid, as she describes:

I didn't know it was chupacabra until I saw some program when I was older, and they were describing it, and I was like "Oh THAT's what it's called!" I have all kinds of shifting fun with that. Sometimes when I'm tense I feel phantom quills raise and 'flicker'. Or instinctively phantom lick up and behind my ear or eye with a tongue of considerable length... For a few year of my life I believed I was a run-of-the-mill vampire because I had a lot of things 'kick in' that many vampires go through with their awakening. However looking back now I realize they belong to the chupa's instincts and behaviours. Truth is again stranger than fiction... The strangest part is... I have notions of shifting from shiharan to chupacabra in a 'back home' setting. It makes me wonder where these animals are from, and what interdimensional disturbances are letting them slip into this world...

The shiharan she references is another aspect of hers that doesn't quite fit any standard mold. She wonders if this self came from what the Elenari, mentioned in the chapter on elves and faeries, referred to as Vor'jen. She has memories of positive cultural relationships with Vor'jen, and some of their descriptions of their culture match her memories of that life. Again, she describes her 'kin self in detail:

Similar height to humans, some a little taller protruding face, slightly muzzle-like angled forehead, longer more oval skull long, sweeping ears, like a mix of human and canid ears larger eyes, slight brow ridge, longer and sharper teeth. Skin anywhere from light tan to sienna to deep soil tones, hair variants are like humans but also include grey to silver-whites and slight olives. long hands and fingers with tough, dark, smooth (usually blunted, as humans clip nails) claws. Hair is manelike, hairline coming to a point in the back low on the neck, face/body hair is finer and shorter than human's, but denser and there's more of it. More like silky fuzz. strong legs with feet about a third longer than human again with blunt brownish claws. Can comfortably walk plantigrade or digitigrade, preferring digi in a run and planti at rest or slower walks. Slender calf-length tail like between a monkey's and a dog's, almost bare at the base with longer hair nearing the end.

This would definitely match with descriptions of Vor'jen, many of whom resembled animals more than elves in a lot of ways. But as she hasn't definitively decided one way or another, I opted to place her in this category for that aspect as well.

While winged humanoids often get tossed into either the angelic or faerie categories, a few remain separate from either of those. Jen is an example. While her 'kin side resembles traditional images of angels, she doesn't identify as one. She explains herself further:

I've always felt there's a lot of pressure to pick a type; that was one of the things that initially pushed me away from the otherkin community. I thought you -had- to be an elf, dragon, faerie, or angel, or you weren't otherkin. A lot of otherkin I've met just call themselves a/an _____ because it's the closest thing to putting a name to what they actually are. There's something reassuring about being able to run into people who are the same species... it also ends up being a letdown for some when they find out that someone else's definition of (for example) 'elf' isn't anything like theirs. So I tend to identify myself by description, which is 'some winged human thing'.

Ashtara is also a winged humanoid, but of a different sort, which she terms Wingborn: "Physical characteristics include wings (bat-type, with downward-pointing bone spurs that the wings attach to), catlike ears, long sharp incisors...good night vision." And Havoc's imp form is a smaller person with wings, though she surmises that perhaps "that's what's masquerading as 'imp.' An unseelie faery."

Dinogrll classifies herself as a shapeshifter in spirit, and has a number of forms she prefers to take on a spiritual level. These include Adasaurus (a kind of dinosaur), gryphon, horse, cheetah, wolf, dragon, and half-demon. She says that these forms may manifest on their own, or combined with each other.

There are also Otherkin who don't fit any human mythology, but at least have a little company. The Brinn/Brrrnn are one example. There's very little information on this particular type of Otherkin. I vaguely remember them being mentioned a bit in my online ramblings back in the mid- to late-1990s, and the only semi-detailed source I could find was a website that's copyright 1998. Still, they're worth mentioning as the history provided doesn't match anything in any traditional human mythos, but has been compiled by more than one person.

Brinn/Brrrnn are apparently subspecies of a type of large, sentient cat from a different plane of reality. Their environment is desert terrain, and they tend towards a wandering lifestyle. The Brinn are descended from the Brrrnn, and the name change is due to an anomaly in the vocal apparatus of the later subspecies that prevents them from

pronouncing "Brrnn" correctly. Other physical differences include thicker pelts and less sensitivity to spices for the Brrnn.³¹¹ The only other site I found that talked about Brrnn/Brinn got its information from a now-defunct website, and additionally talked about "Cats of Kyphur".³¹² Upon doing a little research I found that "kyphur cats" are minor characters in *Werewolf: the Apocalypse*. My copyeditor also mentioned the similarity to the Hrruban in Anne McCaffrey's *Decision at Doona*, but there appears to be enough difference between the feline beings in the novel and the descriptions of Brinn/Brrnn for me to believe that the latter did not spring wholly from the former.

Apparently, not all Otherkin relate to animals of various types. A few plantkin (also known as greenkin) do exist, though there is scarce information. I did, however, get one survey respondent who is plantkin. The anonymous kitsune remembers a previous life as a Lily of the Valley. One thing she emphasizes is that plants are very devoted parents and will put forth great effort to make sure that their offspring get the best start that they can. This matches pretty well with the wide variety of ways that plants disperse their seeds, with all the specialties that have evolved over the millennia.³¹³

These are just a few of the wide variety of "one-of-a-kind" (or close to it) Otherkin. Just because you're alone doesn't mean your experience isn't valid. And, as some of these people have mentioned, it's often better to not latch onto a label that doesn't fit quite right. There's no harm in deviating from a supposed (and usually nonexistent) standard.



³¹¹ Amanjaku and Linz, 1998

³¹² Bode, 2006

³¹³ Those more interested in the consciousness of plants may want to research primary perception, mentioned back in chapter 5.

chapter 8: Spirituality and Magic

For some Otherkin, spirituality and magic are closely bound to their being 'kin. They may believe that being 'kin is just an extension of their spiritual beliefs, or they may see being Otherkin as a way of internalizing magic—or that their Otherkin self is magic personified. Of course, there are also those for whom Otherkin status is completely devoid of either spirituality or magic, or who keep them as two separate parts of their lives, and these need consideration as well.

Spirituality and Religion

Many Otherkin subscribe to human religions. The majority of Otherkin are neopagan. This includes paths like Wicca, Druidism, Asatru (Norse paganism), non-Wiccan witchcraft, and generic paganism. Otherkin can be of any religion, however. Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto, and various permutations of Christianity were mentioned by various survey respondents, and no doubt there are 'kin who follow paths not mentioned here.

Christianity in particular sometimes seems a surprising choice, given that many Christian traditions speak against anything that even remotely resembles the supernatural. While it may seem directly opposed to the concept of Otherkin, Violin Goddess explains why it is her chosen belief system:

I am a Christian and will always be one. But I do believe in reincarnation, because I have past life memories to prove it. It affects my spiritual life a lot. It has widened my views of what is possible (all under God) and even strengthened my faith in God.

Otherkin who resonate with a particular deity may find solace in a path that focuses on that deity. Lysander mentions a particular fondness for Pan, Artemis, Bast, and Anubis, and weaves them into his own personal tapestry of elements from Buddhism and various earth-based faiths. Some 'kin may work within a religious framework based on their culture of origin. For example, Gesigewigu's mentions that "My Spiritual Paradigm is largely influenced by Hinduism, as that is the Paradigm I come from."

Others take inspiration from their past lives, piecing their spiritual paths together from what they remember. The culture from which these

Lupa

'kin come can have very strong effects on their beliefs in this life. Says Rhianna:

We [the Tuatha] have a system of Houses that loosely sometimes work together, in theory at least, under the banner of a Council...my personal beliefs regarding my House are such a strong part of who I am, and there very much is a part of me that considers myself to be a representative of my House and my people on some level or the other and that belief does regulate my day to day activities. My spiritual beliefs are more these internal pre-programmed ideas and memes...

Those who do not have specific memories often work with their intuition to craft a spiritual path that answers both their human and Otherkin sides. They may hybridize human religions (neopaganism again being a popular base) and tweak them so that they reflect the energy of the 'kin side. For instance, a therianthrope may lean towards totemism and neoshamanic paths that address the spirituality of both the human and animal existence. Nimue Moonwolf, who is lupine in nature, is a neopagan who honors Lupa, the wolf who tended Romulus and Remus in Roman mythos. Or they may simply create a belief system based on what it means to them to be Otherkin. Rialian gives an example of this:

The understandings I have achieved through working in an elven way have most certainly affected my path. Most of my current work comes from personal refinement which has connected me more with the flow of what I am...which I see as elven.

There are also Otherkin who are entirely atheistic. For most of them, the 'kin side is primarily psychological and material. Rexar puts it succinctly:

It is, to me, a philosophy. As stated previously, I am very much an atheist, and prefer to maintain a worldview based on what is real and empirically verifiable. I believe that there are limits on our knowledge, imposed on us by the empiracal [sic] nature of our senses, and I believe that what cannot be deduced from a priori truth must be observed and measured; if it is not already in my mind, then it must come from my senses. All reasoning is subordinate to this.

The majority of Otherkin surveyed tended towards a solitary spiritual path rather than organized groups, even if the religion in question is normally group-based, such as Christianity. Those who are part of groups, though, occasionally opt to tell their religious community about their 'kin status. This can have disastrous effects, at least initially. Says Butterfly:

At first, my [ceremonial] magickal group went "Yeesh" when I told them and forbade me to do Reiki around them. Then the other Otherkin in the group were expelled (they deserved it, I might add), and things calmed down. They [the group] became more accepting of it and now I get the occasional joke about making them some shoes.

The various people in a multiple system may not necessarily all be of the same spiritual persuasion. Solo and Duo, while they share the same body, have differing belief systems; Solo has this to say on their paths:

Well, I myself am agnostic technically, or at the very least I don't answer to any deity or higher being other than our Dirty Old Man (Coyote). Being otherkin isn't really a factor in this, but our association with Coyote does have deep roots in the forms we tend to take and the energy we seem to work... My brother Duo is a practicing Catholic, and we were both raised in a strong Irish-Catholic clan household that, regardless of personal spiritual belief structures, has strongly affected our outlook on things. Duo both goes to church as well as volunteers at the family parish, though still considers himself more of a pantheist rather than a monotheist, and adopts an almost Narnian outlook' on his own flavor of Christianity.

Like Solo, for some Otherkin spirituality and being 'kin have nothing in common with each other beyond being traits of the same person. For others, though, the two are mutually inclusive. Tygermoon Foxx is an example of this:

The religious aspects were there long before the therianthropic aspects came into play. My religious beliefs have always included an intimate connection with animals and the concept that we are brethren. My earliest workings dealt with Wolf but as I matured (and partially as a result of the influence of my sun sign, which is Leo) I began strongly identifying with felines. My religious, therianthropic, and "normal" lives overlap one another in so many places I could not separate one from the other if I tried and I would not want to. I live my religion and my beliefs are put into practice even for every day mundane tasks like cleaning house. When I do ritual, I almost always officiate as cat and woman. My primary goddesses, Bast and Freyja, both have strong connections to cats.

For some, being Otherkin affects their relationship with religion and spirituality. Willow, a puma therianthrope, says that "It allows me to see through the glamour of religion. It tells me that the only valid thing is the wild, and that all else is secondary (not that "all else" isn't valuable to those who hold it so)". Raki says that her view of the way the Universe works is affected quite a bit by being Otherkin:

Being Otherkin makes the cosmos seem a lot more vast, lonely and chaotic than most mythologies and cosmologies seem to. In all the religions I've had contact with, the spiritual world is conceived as ordered and regular, with each being having its own place and fulfilling a function. When anything oversteps its bounds, it gets punished. Conflict is regulated, as is mobility.

The Otherkin cosmology is completely chaotic. Things get reincarnated as things they're not supposed to be. Things go all over the place, between worlds and dimensions. Deities aren't all-powerful, they're just some powerful beings that sometimes people ally themselves with out of common value or spiritual gain. Nobody's in charge. Bad things happen and nobody does anything about them. Memory, will, and imagination all have a profound effect on everything, and almost everything is voluntary.

Rumor's identity holds a strong role in her spirituality:

Being a dragon is a major component of my spiritual life. It fulfills the same need that religion does for a lot of other people. It gives me a sense of place in the universe. It gives me a bit of comfort about the continuity of life after death. It gives me a sense of awe, and also a sense of inner power. Though it doesn't answer the question of why I'm here and what my purpose in life is, it offers some interesting ideas and guidelines on the topic.

Similarly, the Silver Elves, find that being elven and being spiritual are one and the same:

Being elves is our spiritual life. We have no religion but our relationship with Elfin/Faerie and our relations with others, are all based upon our spiritual beliefs about the evolutionary nature of Life. We practice Elfin magic and it is a daily/lived event, that is, we live our magic.

Still, as seems to be the case with Otherkin in general, there are no hard-and-fast rules when it comes to spiritual beliefs. To assume all 'kin are magic-using neopagans would exclude a sizable portion of the community. On the other hand, there are a significant number of magic users in the subculture, which I'll cover later on in this chapter.

"Otherkin" Isn't a Religion, But....

Occasionally people outside of the Otherkin community (or who are new to it) may mistakenly interpret Otherkin as a religion. Examples of this may be found in several academic works on new religious movements. In one collection of essays, an endnote mentions a student

of the author who is studying Otherkin, described as "a 'religious movement' which, at least in some of its forms, largely exists only on the net"³¹⁴. A very similar footnote shows up in a more recent work, along with a link to a resource from Kinhost.org.³¹⁵

While the assumptions of these examples are a little off, there are a few religions and other groups of varying levels of organization that use the imagery of mythological beings or, more rarely, involve organizing Otherkin. Though the actual Otherkin participation varies, they're worth mentioning here, as long as I'm on the subject of religion.

Probably the best-known of these are the variants on Wicca and/or witchcraft that deal with the fey, though the actual fey-related content may vary. There is the Faerie Faith, a particular offshoot of Dianic Wicca, and the Feri tradition, created by Victor and Cora Anderson. Another is the Faery Wicca tradition of Kisma Stephanich, though other people also follow their own beliefs which they may label "faery Wicca".³¹⁶

One particularly unique group is the Calyr Elves church. The adherents of this religion claim to be descended from a particular race of elves; however, this seems to be entirely separate from any other group of elves, including the Elenari. The Calyr religion is based on a rather elaborate mythos that seems to be taken at least partly, if not entirely, metaphorically. Members may also adhere to other religions, however.³¹⁷

Another community worth mentioning here is Faerie Nation, founded by Francesca De Grandis, author of self-help humor *The Modern Goddess' Guide To Life* and other books on spiritual evolution. Although not a religious organization, Faerie Nation is described by De Grandis as "An interfaith, interdisciplinary, inter-twining of newly-evolving DNA... The nature of the group is mystical and celebratory". Membership is entirely open, and the focus is similar to some of the sentiments I recall from the Otherkin community in the mid-1990s, dedicated to reawakening magic in a mundane world. While some of the folks in Faerie Nation identify as other than human, the emphasis is on those who are "fey-touched". This includes not only those who could be described as Otherkin, but also those who are creative and see that creativity as a mark of Faerie.

Some Otherkin may particularly resonate with de Grandis' words:

³¹⁴ Dawson, 2003, 290

³¹⁵ Dawson, 2004, 172

³¹⁶ Information on various pagan paths may be found at <http://www.witchvox.com/xtrads.html>

³¹⁷ See <http://www.calyr.org/>

*The world is full of people who feel like cosmic orphans and I am one of them, or at least, I was...I've waited lifetimes for the fey spark in humans to fully ignite again. And, more and more, the ancient starlit blood has come forward. Finally, momentum hit critical mass; the magic is suddenly--and thoroughly--awake in huge numbers of people. Fey-touched! Star-drenched!*³¹⁸

Again, although Faerie Nation isn't just about Otherkin, nor is it an Otherkin spirituality, there are some ideas that many Otherkin may empathize with. Faerie Nation Mag published its first issue in November of 2006, and it's worth checking out.³¹⁹

The Temple of the Vampire was founded in 1989; their website says that one must purchase a copy of the Vampire Bible in order to join, and that the book includes the necessary information for working with the "Undead Gods" through whom the Temple originated.³²⁰ They further go on to claim the monopoly on authentic Vampiric religion.³²¹ The site also sells exclusively designed jewelry with the Temple's logo on it.

The Therian Temple is in many ways almost a complete clone of the Temple of the Vampire, except for involving therianthropes instead of vampires. It has a Therian Bible that must be bought in order to join the temple, and very strict ideas of what therians are and aren't.³²² Members must take the "Oath of Therion", which states that the member has to follow the "Therian Code" (which includes being vegan) and that not doing so goes against Nature.³²³

The Therian Bible includes some of the basic tenets of the Therian Temple, some advice to new therians on how to be better in touch with their theriotype and other common-sense advice (like not telling everyone and their mother that you're therian). There are also rituals regarding mental shifting (which is basically a guided meditation similar to a power animal journey, only you are the animal) and physical shifting (not literal p-shifting, but rather a very strong mental/sensory shift).³²⁴ The Vampire Bible, on the other hand, seems to combine the ego-driven power and style of LaVeyan Satanism with vampiric mythos and imagery. It's more ritual-oriented than the Therian Bible, and includes information on various types of psychic vampirism, though a lot of it is nothing wildly different from what other sources describe. Some may balk at their focus on "the Undead Gods", and their

³¹⁸ de Grandis, Francesca, personal communication, September 19, 2006

³¹⁹ See <http://www.outlawbunny.com/FNMsubscription.html>

³²⁰ Temple of the Vampire, 2006-B

³²¹ Temple of the Vampire, 2006-A

³²² Therian Temple, 2006-A

³²³ Therian Temple, 2006-B

³²⁴ Noctis, 2006

insistence that vampires are inherently superior to humanity.³²⁵ However, in the case of both of the temples, the material isn't anything too different from what's already out there in various Otherkin and occult texts, and so those willing to pay for membership may find some familiar ideas to work with.³²⁶

Another group, the Order of the Vampyre, combines elements of Satanism (or, more specifically, the Temple of Set) with a unique interpretation of vampirism. The official website gives very little information, other than to say that, in essence, real vampires don't drink blood (apparently there are better alternatives which can be learned from the Order). Similarly to the Temple of the Vampire, it's very heavy on the Satanic/Setian philosophy.³²⁷

It should be noted that vampire Houses and other social and networking groups of Otherkin are not the same as these temples. They generally don't cost money to get in, don't have pieces of Holy Writ that must be purchased in order to gain membership, and are generally more open about what they stand for on more than just the very basic levels. Many have extensive websites detailing House-related information, as well as discussion forums, most of which are accessible through a free registration. And the Vampire Church, though it may sound religious, is actually more about networking than religion.³²⁸

One other thing worth mentioning is the "Elenari Healing System". This was written by Gail Lehmann, a Reiki master who claims to have channelled it. The system doesn't actually have anything to do with Elenari Otherkin, though it mentions a mishmash of beings including the Fae, Angels and Starseed. The author claims it is not a form of Reiki; however, it does incorporate symbols in the same way Reiki does. The system is designed to be given freely, and both legal and karmic warnings are given against selling the system.

One detail that caused some concern among Otherkin I discussed this with is the claim that the word "Elenari" is copyrighted: "*The term (sic) Elenari, Elenari Reiki and the term Elenari Healing System are copyrighted*" (italics mine).³²⁹ However, this ignores a little-known fact of copyright law: you can't copyright a word (at least not as of this writing). You can trademark a brand name, and perhaps that's what she meant.

³²⁵ The Temple of the Vampire, 1989

³²⁶ The Therian Temple has been a particular point of contention within the therian community. You can find some of the more common concerns about it in one episode of the Darkened Souls podcast, <http://www.planetparanormal.com/podcast/index.php?id=40>.

³²⁷ Aquino, Butch, Neilly and Thompson, unknown

³²⁸ There is an entire disclaimer to this effect on their website, <http://www.vampire-church.com/>.

³²⁹ Lehmann, 2004

But given that the Elenari themselves have been using the term for years, and that it's derived from Tolkien's elvish, I don't think anyone's going to have to worry about being sued for referring to themselves as Elenari.

Otherkin and Magic

While not all Otherkin practice magic, a significant number do. Being 'kin can be a decided asset in magical practice in a number of ways. To some 'kin, the very state of being 'kin means being magical, whether referring to a particular connection to magic, or a species originating from magic itself. Teriel's experience as a dragon, for example, was that of being a creature of magic, even feeding on magical energy. He says that this magical nature made it exceptionally easy to travel among the various planes of existence—what metaphysics often refer to as astral, etheric, spiritual, and other planes. "Magic is not only part of our Elven cultural aerie-tage but is an integral aspect of our essential BEING," the Silver Elves remark in one of their letters. "When we speak of magical powers we refer to Love, Trust, Friendship, Kindness, Gentleness, Modesty and Healing...Song and Dance and Music. Every time we sing an elfin song we have created a space for Elfin to manifest and in every smile we share our powers have grown."³³⁰

For others being Otherkin is not inherently magical in and of itself, but it is closely tied in with the magic they practice. Erelin says:

It has affected this aspect of my life rather greatly. Before awakening, I was attempting down many different paths to self-realization. Now that I am more-or-less myself, in mind at least, I attempt to continue the shamanism that I did before; only now I regard my "community" as my friends and family. Bringing my magic from the other side of things, I can say that if I was not otherkin, I probably would not practice the form of magic I do at all if it wasn't for what I am.

The very belief/knowledge of being 'kin almost automatically requires the same openness and flexibility of mind that fosters the belief/knowledge of magic. To be 'kin we have to accept that the multiverse/universe/reality is not limited solely to its physical manifestation, and extend that acceptance to ourselves. For elves, faekin, dragons and similar folk, there's the presupposition of sentient beings other than humans somewhere in this Multiverse and that we have some connection to them, whether through past/alternate lives, a universal collective unconscious, or some other bond that allows us to adopt

³³⁰ Silver Elves, 2001, p. 98

some of their traits. To accept that therianthropes exist we have to understand that our totemic bonds can be fully internal, that souls can transverse species, or at the very least that our primitive sides can be expressed in the form of animal identities. If we allow vampires in our multiverse as well, we consider that energy, both in its pure form and in the form of blood, can be directly transferred from one person to another, and that this process may be necessary for the health of some. Finally, the ideas of multiples and walk-ins completely throws the traditional idea of one body = one soul on its ear. If we can accept these realities it's not too much of a stretch to believe/know that we can alter consciousness and perception through magic.

As with religion, nature-based, neopagan, or neoshamanic magical paths tend to be the most popular, though everything from ceremonialism to Chaos magic can be found in the paths of Otherkin. It's also not uncommon for Otherkin to practice magic without any sort of formal structure whatsoever. Sometimes it's something that occurs spontaneously. Áine relates a story along these lines:

I don't "practice" per sé... I do spur of the moment magical things, perhaps. For example, in 1999 I was vacationing in Nova Scotia, walking along the shore of the ocean. The sea was so calm it was like glass and I picked up a gull feather. This tune came into my head (from where, I have no idea!) and I began humming along with it and moving the feather in a weaving fashion through the air, and as I did so, the sea began forming great waves, crashing up against the rocks. The more I hummed and moved the feather, the wilder the waves became, almost washing a friend of mine off the rocks she was climbing on. When I stopped doing that, the sea returned to glass, as it had been before I started. How useful that actually is, I don't know, but I'm well aware that isn't something everyone can do, and I know I did it.

As for rituals themselves, being Otherkin can affect either the type of magic that is practiced, or the role that one tends to play in group settings. Some Otherkin practice magic that is similar to that which they believe they did in other lives. Temperance+++ believes his being angelkin contributes to his tendency to take a protective role during rituals: "I am always the Circle Caster and Gate Keeper in our coven. I feel it is my will, and obligation to perform this role in rituals. I believe others recognize this and encourage me to continue in that role."

Glamourbombs and Other Magical Items

One form of magic that is often associated with the Otherkin community is glamourbombing. It's defined as "an anonymous act that causes people to feel brushed by the divine, the supernatural, or the

realm of faerie, and plants in their minds the sense that maybe there is more to the universe than meets the eye." Ironically enough, two of the key developers of this form of magic do not identify as 'kin'.³³¹

The direct inspiration of glamourbombing came from Hakim Bey's "Poetic Terrorism" essay. Unfortunately, some of the suggestions aren't exactly legal: "Burglarize houses but instead of stealing, leave Poetic-Terrorist objects. Kidnap someone & make them happy."³³² Rather than utilizing actions that could result in destruction of property and/or arrest, glamourbombing is a much more playful, innocent incarnation of this general concept: "The word "bomb" in glamour bombing is simply a metaphor. In this sense it is more about blowing minds, or demolishing paradigms, and has nothing to do with destructive acts."³³³

Glamourbombing can take a number of forms. The most common is creating a small piece of artwork with a magical intent and then leaving it where a passerby will find it and then be exposed to the glamour within it. I am fond of leaving colorful feathers behind, and I have seen small bits of origami used as well. In fact, any shiny, eye-catching objects are effective bases for glamourbombs, as people tend to be very sight-oriented and habitually pick things up to examine them. sade describes one of the very first glamourbombings (if *not* the first), back in 1997: "We mostly had little slips of paper printed up saying 'Thee Gates Are Opening', in fancy font and Victorian border, which we rolled into scrolls and tied with iridescent bits of pipecleaner. Took these around various places...a goth show, Geneva on the Lake, wherever else. I continued to graffiti that phrase around for a while afterwards – even to the present, though rarely any more."

There are plenty of other vehicles that can be used for glamourbombing. Chalking sidewalks is always a cheap and popular choice that leaves no permanent damage. Impromptu street theatre and other visual artwork is an excellent tool for bolder glamourbombers. Get a pad of sticky notes and either draw sigils or write messages on them and leave them where people will find them. (You can use materials that are a little more biodegradable if you're particularly environmentally-conscious.)

While glamourbombing is most often associated with elven and fae folk, pretty much any magical practitioner, 'kin or otherwise, may play with it. If you like, tailor your glamourbombs to the sort of aesthetic you associate with your type of 'kin. For instance, as a therianthrope I like to use small bits of bone, feather and stone for a neotribal look.

³³¹ McDill and Nadii, 2005

³³² Bey, 1991, p. 5

³³³ McDill and Nadii, 2005

Some fae may use bases that involve bright colors and interesting textures, such as a bundle of glitter wrapped in tissue paper. Kitsune might like to make small sketches of foxes or leave behind little piles of rice to honor Inari, the Japanese fox deity. Raethyn for example, uses a wide variety of methods to momentarily shake people out of their mundane patterns:

I participate more in the "mindfucking" aspect of it that Discordians use rather than "glamourbombing," but I have done it. I've also participated in genderqueering from time to time. One notable glamourbomb moment of mine was when I made me a pair of black short horns not unlike the set of horns I had on my head most of the time in my previous incarnation. I wore them to school for a week straight before the v.p. [vice president] tried to take them from me. When anybody asked, I just said "I'm a demon...dub." I've also been known to tag "magick happens" over racist and bigot comments under select bridges, and sprinkle glitter on people, but my main glamourbombing is more indirect through my writing.

As for the magic itself, the glamourbombs may either be charged prior to the glamourbombing run as a part of the creation, or the very act of placing them may serve as the charge. In addition, the attention given to them by those who find them adds the energy of their focus, even if for a moment, to the magic. I like to give them a little boost before I go out, and I also like to let my intuition serve me as I find places to leave them. In fact, intuition can be a key component of glamourbombing; if a particular place "calls" to you, that's where you need to make your mark.

The type of magic used is often for a light-hearted purpose. I usually charge mine with the intent that the people who pick them up will experience a moment of pure wonder, where all the worries in their lives are forgotten in the face of some small miracle. Glamourbombs may also be charged with general healing or luck energy. In addition, they can simply be filled with pure magic to bring about a shift in reality for the finders, with no real intent as to how it will manifest. Instead, the magic chooses its own method of materializing in the mundane world. Theoretically glamourbombs could be used for negative purposes, but that sort of defeats the original concept.

So where do you leave glamourbombs? Wherever people will find them. Countertops at coffeeshops, window sills, automobile windshields, hanging from tree branches, dangling from clothes racks, doors of businesses, busy (but not too busy) sidewalks, bus stops—all these places and more will serve as perfect perches for your creations. Just be subtle about it (unless you're putting on a deliberate performance!) The last thing you need is for some concerned citizen worrying that you're leaving behind a real bomb!

Glamourbombing can be done alone, though some prefer group efforts. You can all be leaving different little gifts all around, or you may want to put on a single-act play in the cultural district on a Saturday night. Try spreading out over an area, or, alternately, working as a group. Just make sure everyone knows where you left the car!

Of course, there is always the chance that your creation will end up being picked up by some ignorant individual who will proceed to destroy it, or that your performance will be heckled. Simply make sure that you are just detached enough from the magic that there's no real connection to you or put on a thick skin and enjoy yourself! Focus on the positive effects you bring forth and leave the naysayers to their devices. Another word of caution: if you're putting on a street performance, make sure you make it clear that you're not busking (performing for money). Many places have regulations regarding busking, and again, a run-in with Johnny Law may very well put a damper on your night. Finally, (and this should go without saying) avoid private property. It'd just be lovely if you happened to annoy the sourest person in the neighborhood who can wither any glamour with a glance!

You can also use being Otherkin as an influence on other magical and artistic creations (after all, good art is magic in and of itself!). Much of my artwork, ritual tools, and other magical items I create reflect my therianthropy. I work a lot with animal parts—bones, fur, feathers, and so forth. While being therian doesn't necessarily make one a scavenger of such things, it does work into the general tapestry of myself that also includes being a pagan, a totemist, and an animist. I do also create a lot of work that honors Wolf, both the totemic Wolf without, and the therianthrope Wolf within.

I also like to draw on a little bit of personal mythology. Although *Werewolf: the Apocalypse* is much maligned among the therian community, I must admit that I do like some of the magical items described and illustrated, particularly in the copy of the second edition source book I have. In it there are pictures of interesting talismans made of bone and feathers and beads. Many of them are never explained, but I like the general idea. So sometimes I'll get into my art supplies and just let my intuition guide me without consciously planning a particular project. I may grab an antler, some horse hair, some stone and wooden beads, and tie it all together with artificial sinew with no particular destination in mind. But when the piece is complete, it has a certain energy about it that reflects my perception of the *W:zA* influence.

While less related to being therian, but still of note, I also take inspiration from numerous fantasy novels I've read. A magician or shaman or other such person will hand one of the main characters a magical item, perhaps for protection or strength. It's usually described somewhere along the lines of "a piece of bone wrapped in leather and

painted with strange sigils", though the specific meanings of each component are never divulged, and they don't match any magical correspondences found in magical practice today. So, again, I'll let that inspire me without any set goal in mind. It isn't strictly therian, but it speaks to that same pattern in my life.

In the same way, any artistic 'kin can use their 'kin sides, as well as fiction that they choose to work into their personal mythology, to alter and enhance their creations. Try thinking of what your 'kin side would create or use, and then duplicate it as best as you can.

Incidentally, Francesca de Grandis, unfamiliar with Otherkin, independently came up with the concept of "Outlaw Clowns" as a part of Faerie Nation. Much like glamourbombers, Outlaw Clowns will "post broadsides and engage in other acts of guerilla spirituality that for example help the fey-touched find wholeness".³³⁴ This demonstrates how ideas can develop independently from each other and yet share quite a bit in common.

Invocation

The Makah of the Pacific Northwest had, as one of their most important masked rituals, a four-day-long wolf ceremony. Used as a rite of passage for younger members of the tribe, it involved wolf masks and costumery and related imagery. At several key points those who are dressed as wolves and other animals essentially become those animals. The crescendo of wild energy is followed by a sudden calm. "In their sudden serenity is evidence of their rebirth; the strength of their bearing shows they have internalized the strength of the wolf."³³⁵

This ritual is a prime example of invocation, the act of bringing an outer energy inward, or bringing forth an energy already within. As mentioned in the theories chapter, it's possible to invoke your 'kin self in order to strengthen their influence in your life, just as the Makah and other tribal peoples have done for centuries. Even if you live life fully Otherkin-identified, or in a balance between human and 'kin, invocation can accentuate further the particular psychological and energetic effects of being 'kin.

I was first introduced to the idea of deliberately invoking aspects of the self through Peter J. Carroll's *Liber Null and Psychonaut*. Amid other parts of Chaos magic, Carroll described how to divide the self by the eight colors of magic, and invoking the aspect associated with each color—for instance, red magic in Chaos magic terms is war magic, and so a red magic invocation would call on the War self, the part of you

³³⁴ de Grandis, Francesca, personal communication, September 19, 2006
³³⁵ Lopez, 1978, 128-131

that is aggressive, that defends and attacks, whether in a literal or abstract sense.

Invocation can also allow you to understand why you sometimes feel the need to take a certain action, and how to recognize when that part of yourself is coming into play, so you can decide whether it's a good idea at the time or not. The concept of invoking parts of the self can be used with any paradigm. You can invoke the aspects that correspond with Goetic demons, with members of a certain pantheon, or even personifications of your chakras. It all depends on how you want to divide yourself up. People are capable of expressing the entire range of emotions and thought patterns, but we are conditioned to narrow ourselves down solely to the ego. Through invocation, though, we can more easily access the less-used emotions and thoughts, the things that we may think are uncharacteristic.

This applies to Otherkin in that invocation can be a method of exploring the 'kin self independently of the human aspect. It also allows a degree of control that isn't found in the sometimes spontaneous fluctuations that bring the 'kin self to the surface in response to environmental stimuli, emotions, or sheer randomness. With an invocation, you are deliberately calling on that part of yourself, and because you are doing it in a ritualized format, you have a formula you can use to reverse the magic as well. You're temporarily bringing everything that is Other to the fore, without any distractions, to better recognize its role in your life.

One theory I touched on previously is the idea that you can potentially create a 'kin self through invocation. Just as working with spirits on a regular basis can help create a stronger relationship with them, so can repeated invocation enhance the parts of yourself that correspond to what you're invoking. As I mentioned earlier, Ellwood states that when you invoke an entity, s/he leaves behind a small bit of his own energy that can make subsequent invocations easier. You can also use it to change your own energy signature via manipulation of biophotonic energy, bringing it closer to that of the entity invoked: "Likewise Otherkin who use magic may introduce dragon, faerie or other energies into their DNA, particularly by applying the theory of resonance...as it applies to meshing their genetic structure with their Other energy".³³⁶ As I discussed in the theories chapter, we can expand our range of energy, emotion and thought through conscious effort. If this is true, then it should be possible to expand it to the point of creating a new aspect. This, of course, is highly controversial. There are a lot of Otherkin who believe very strongly that Otherkin are born, not made. They point at people who have a single encounter with a totem

³³⁶ Ellwood 2007

animal and automatically assume they're therianthropes, or who read one of Mercedes Lackey's *Valdemar* books and become convinced that they're really gryphons in human flesh.

Still there are a few examples that show that with enough work it is possible. The key is effort—a single spell of wishful thinking generally will not suffice to dramatically alter your personality and/or energy in any manner. With magic of any sort, you get out of it what you put into it. Success is likely less common than claims thereof, but the possibility should not be written off entirely.

Belief is a powerful tool, and even science, in the form of quantum physics, shows that perception shapes reality. Anyone who practices magic for a time discovers that it really is possible to affect reality (internal as well as external) through your own focused desires; it's a matter of figuring out what foci work best for you, hence the many types of magic. And the concept of modeling in neuro-linguistic programming demonstrates that if you adopt the habits, mannerisms and other traits of a person (or other entity) you want to be like, eventually you assimilate those traits into your own being and effectively become that which you model. This last particularly resembles Soreth's experience:

I am the origin of my Otherkin nature — it is what I most want to be, would become if I had the ability to take on its shape. My thoughts, personality, dreams, hopes, all these things together make it. It is the deepest expression of my spirituality and my personality.

Heron described to me a more formal shifting of self, in which part of his initiation into the priesthood of a Draconic Wiccan coven was also used to bond him to a dragon spirit which subsequently altered Heron himself in some fundamental manner:

In form, it was a classic Alexandrian Wiccan initiation, much like the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd degrees. The details were different, for the format was the same. The bonding was designed to be for all lifetimes, and the point was that I was agreeing to be the representative of a particular dragon-spirit in this world. This bonding had connotations of both a working partnership and a marriage. The dragons were conceptualized as external beings, and I am not at all certain that my own experience of being both separation and total unity is all that common among people who have done this ritual - a larger degree of separation seems to be more usual...

Shortly after the ritual (for the next few weeks) I experienced moments of vividly feeling being a dragon or being simultaneously human and dragon. On windy days, I could feel breezes blowing past my large wings, and I still remember on time on a bus when someone roughly jostled me and I almost reacted as a dragon - I had to stop my

hands from clawing out at the person, while I hissed fiercely, and my thoughts were of biting the person but not eating them.

Since that time, I can contact my dragon whenever I wish, but the contact is typically fairly vague and empathic...occasionally, and this has very much become easier as time has gone on, I can bring my dragon to the front - the experience is of being myself as a dragon.³³⁷

While in this particular situation there is an external dragon involved, the magician himself was permanently and deeply changed as a result of the bonding. Many of his experiences are the same as those experienced by other newly Awakened 'kin, which suggests that the internal metamorphosis was a success.

This may seem rather blasphemous to some Otherkin who believe that you simply are Otherkin and that you cannot just become Other. However, a concentrated application of psychology, energy work and modeling seem to have been quite effective in the above cases; Heron is someone I know personally, and he has never struck me as anything less than genuine or mature about being dragonkin. And keep in mind that invocation need not necessarily be just of an entity—you can also invoke an energy, an idea, or a belief, and integrate it permanently into yourself. We go through fundamental changes many times in our lives; the difference with invocation is that it is conscious and directed.

The methods of invocation are as diverse as magical practitioners themselves. If you're used to practicing magic, feel free to use whatever invocation method(s) you normally use. If not, I suggest getting a basic understanding of magic before you undertake this exercise. *Liber Null and Psychonaut* is a good starting place, as it not only explains magic at a basic, workable level, but also describes the aforementioned invocation method as well. Much of Ellwood's work, particularly *Pop Culture Magick* and *Inner Alchemy*, also involves invocation.

A very basic formula for invocation could work like this: Get yourself to a place where you won't be disturbed; a quiet room in your home or a remote place in the woods (beware of trespassing!) will work well. If you like, prepare the area as you would any ritual space (purification, casting a circle, etc.). Get into a comfortable position that you can hold for a while. Breathe slowly and deeply while you relax your body, and then clear your mind of thoughts.

Actually calling on your 'kin self depends on how you prefer invocations. You can vocally call it to the surface of your being. If you have memories of another life, you can use them as a sort of mnemonic

³³⁷ Heron, personal communication, August 2006

to bring the 'kin self forth. Relive that life in your mind to the best of your ability, in as much detail as you can render. You might try a little character acting—moving, talking, and otherwise acting in the ways that you feel typifies your 'kin side. Draw on sensory memories from that life/existence/aspect, and note the differences in how things looked, sounded, and felt compared to now, as well as any differences in the way your body moved. Carroll (and others) recommend props as ways to heighten the mood, from clothing to ritual tools to decorating the setting itself. Some people use a single garment or piece of jewelry to symbolize their 'kin selves.

Remember as you're doing this invocation—this is a part of you, not just an outer being (though you may call on external spirits for aid, if you wish). Even if you're multiple, the person you're asking to come forward is still a part of that system. Therefore the shift tends to be more natural and subtle than bringing outer entities into yourself. Each person's experience is different, so I'm not really going to try to describe what you should or shouldn't feel. Needless to say, when it works, the result is unmistakable.

Once you are ready to head back into the every day world, it's time to reverse your magic. You can either do this by calling your human side back to hir usual place, or by asking the 'kin self to retreat back to where s/he normally is, or both. You can declare the ritual at an end, or if you have a piece of clothing or jewelry that symbolizes your 'kin self, take it off. Close the ritual however you like, just give yourself time to shift back to your usual mindset. If you're feeling light-headed, eat something heavy on protein to ground yourself energetically and physically.

You may also want to have someone trustworthy and level-headed around during your first experimentations if you're not experienced in invocation. Chances are that the invocation will be relatively quiet, that you'll simply experience some of the thought patterns and perceptions of your 'kin self. But it's a good idea, at least until you know you have control over yourself, to have someone with you to be sure you don't wander off and get hurt or scare the locals. And, if you're around other people, having a minder can help in case someone decides to cause trouble for you. Finally, if you're out in the middle of nowhere, having a backup driver is always a good idea in case of a worst-case scenario.

One last note: invoking the 'kin self is not an excuse to be an idiot. Invocation, as I said earlier when discussing theories, is not possession. You are still in control of your 'kin self, just as you are in control of your human self. These are not alien entities taking over your body—if you are a cougar therian, you should have enough control to not go and attack someone. You are responsible for all aspects of

yourself, to include all actions thereof. Invocation is a choice you make, and if it goes wrong it's your responsibility.

Evocation

Where invocation brings an external entity or energy directly into you, evocation simply calls that entity/energy to you, but outside of you. Evocation is most commonly done as a way of asking entities for help with a particular magical purpose. However, placing an energy or entity into an object in order to charge it for a specific purpose is also an example of evocation.

Invoking the Otherkin self can enhance evocative magic related to what type of 'kin you are. For instance, I find that being a therianthrope helps me relate to animal totems quite easily. When I work with totems, I'll sometimes invoke my Wolf self to improve communication in areas where my human side may be a little confused. I've found that totems often speak in terms of instincts and sensations more than humans do, and so being able to access the part of myself that speaks that language aids me in better communication. Feykin may find that they can work with their spiritual kin quite easily, and dragonkin with their draconic counterparts. While not all Otherkin necessarily work with the spirits that they're related to, so to speak, being 'kin can be an asset in such magic.

If you already possess an affinity with spirits of a certain type because of being Otherkin, there's a good chance that they'll be more receptive to you because of it. This doesn't automatically guarantee you a free meal ticket. Never assume that any entity will automatically help you. In fact, encountering your spiritual 'kin can be a little overwhelming. I've had experiences where I've called on a particular spirit, had hir manifest, and immediately thought "Holy cow—this is the real deal! What am I playing at?" Still, if you work at developing a healthy relationship, the benefits can be exceptionally helpful. I always invite my "friends, family and guardians" to my rituals, and I've received a good bit of help from them, especially when I needed it most.

The methods of evocation are as varied as invocation. A general process is to prepare the ritual area with objects, decorations and offerings that are pleasing to the entity being evoked. If you have a picture or other depiction of the entity you're evoking, use it as a way to focus on calling hir forth; in fact, you can evoke hir right into it, allowing the physical object to anchor hir to this reality.

The actual evocation can be as simple as stating your intent ("It is my Will that [name of entity] should be brought forth here") to reciting a myth about hir. Contrary to popular depiction, you probably won't be any physical signs of a successful evocation, such as the room growing

colder, or things getting thrown at you by invisible forces. If you're sensitive to energy you may notice the energy of the entity when s/he arrives. Otherwise, you may just end up having to take it on faith that your evocation worked, and look at the success of your magic over time to figure out what worked.

You might try evoking the spirits of those from your Other life (if you believe in reincarnation as your origin) to get more details to fill in the holes in your memory. Or you could evoke more general entities of your type to get ideas on how to integrate being Other with everyday life. Cultivating a good relationship with your nonhuman "family", as it were, can go a long way in future magical practices, as stated above, and evocation is a good way to touch base and ask favors or make deals. You can even invite them to take a greater role in your life as you get to know each other better.

Kira's works with her elven kin and related forms of magic, sometimes to the end of crossing the Veils between the worlds as much as is humanly possible:

Personally, my main deal is experimental magic and working with the Land Powers. The main focus of my magical studies has been the enchantment of art, and the workings of the Veil between Worlds. No, not interested in running away or "going home"; I just don't like having borders closed to me. And it's interesting, occasionally terrifyingly so.

Other Forms of Magic

Many Otherkin practice energy work of various forms. One example is Reiki, a Japanese form of energy work often used for healing. There is a form of Reiki that has been developed by one group of Otherkin, called Open Source Reiki. While it is based on traditional Reiki practices, it is much more unorthodox (as the title Open Source suggests). The form is attributed to Rialian and his late draconic brother Evoyah, both of whom are described as nontraditional Reiki practitioners. Evoyah had come up with the idea for compiling information about Otherkin-flavored Reiki practices, and after his death the Open Source Reiki wiki was born.³³⁸

Psychic vampires learn energy work out of necessity. The first book published specifically on psychic vampirism, Belanger's *The Psychic Vampire Codex*, is subtitled "A Manual of Magick and Energy Work". True to that description, a large portion of the book discusses energy

work of various types useful to psychic vampires (and non-vampires as well).

However, Otherkin don't need to limit themselves to Otherkin-specific types of energy work. There are plenty of sources available; authors such as Barbara Ann Brennan, B. K. Frantzis, Mantak Chia, Karla McLaren, and Robert Bruce have excellent books on energy work. For basic Reiki, Diane Stein's *Essential Reiki* has gotten a lot of good feedback. And anyone who knows basic energy working techniques can develop hir own system.

One thing that I have found is that my being Wolf has affected the types of magic I prefer to work. My first area of magical study was animal totemism, which branched out into a number of other areas of animal and natural magic. As I have mentioned, being a therianthrope has helped me to communicate with totems relatively easily, as well as other animal spirits. This branches out into my artwork, creating ritual tools, jewelry and other such things out of old fur coats, taxidermy mounts, and so forth. The magic involved with that is to communicate with the spirit in the fur or bone and ask it what it would like to be made into, and again I believe that being a therian aids me in that magic.

If you're interested in magic but aren't really sure where to start, try studying forms of magic associated with whatever your Other side is. There are a couple of books on dragon magic, a number about faerie magic, and others dedicated to various "mythological" beings. However, many of these tend to be pretty lightweight, and so while they can be a decent introduction, it's best to go from there into other forms of magic, mythology, etc.

The nice thing about magic is the more you practice, the easier it is for you to tweak it to your own preferences. You can start with a more generalized system such as Wicca or Chaos magic, and as you get the hang of it add in specific imagery or correspondences that mesh with being Otherkin. I started with a generic neopagan format early on, but soon gave up the elements at each quarter for four different animals. Most of the deities I work with are associated with wildlife, and a lot of my magical creations, such as pouches and charms, incorporate small bits of fur or bone. But you don't have to work magic based on being 'kin. It's all a matter of finding what works best for you.

A Field Guide
Chapter 9: So You Think You're Otherkin?

Awakening is a process, not an event. —Jarandhel Dreamsinger³³⁹

I'm sure this is going to be on a lot of readers' minds. After all, chances are good that if you've picked up this book you're either questioning whether you're 'kin or not, or you know you're 'kin and reading the rest of this book has sparked some thought on your own experiences.

Allow me to be the first to say that I am hardly an expert on Awakening. I have only my own first-hand experiences, those of friends, and the stories of those I've communicated with for this book to go on, and everyone's path is different. What I've compiled here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you explore yourself and your possibilities. So grab your salt shaker (if you don't already have it in hand by now) and read on.

Who 'Can' or 'Can't' Be Otherkin? ³⁴⁰

By now, if you've been reading this book cover to cover, you've probably got a pretty good idea of what Otherkin are, what some of us believe about ourselves, and why we believe it. However, defining the exact parameters of who "counts" as Otherkin varies. After all, how do we determine when someone is "genuine" instead of just trying to get attention?

As with everything involving Otherkin, there's a wide spectrum of litmus tests. It really is an individual decision, but how accepting is too accepting? If someone says that s/he is the reincarnation of a leader of a herd of purple carnivorous unicorns from Alpha Centauri, do we simply accept hir at hir word, since we weren't there—and maybe s/he was? Or do we limit hir acceptability to that which synchs up, more or less, with known mythology about unicorns?

There are a couple of factors to bring into consideration. While they're not automatic disqualifiers, they tend to be commonly questioned by most Otherkin.

How long has the person identified as Otherkin? Chances are fair that if s/he just discovered the s/he is 'kin last week, but already has hir

³³⁹ Dreamsinger, 2005
³⁴⁰ Quotes from this section of the chapter come from personal communication, August 13, 2006.

full life story, s/he probably hasn't done too much self-reflection. This doesn't necessarily negate hir experiences, but I'd give hir more time to solidify hir story first. Discovering who you are, regardless of whether it's being Otherkin or not, is a long process that involves questioning yourself heavily. On the other hand, don't necessarily discount hir. Give hir some time to work through this new information.

Does s/he claim to be something that's relatively well-known, such as an elf or a dragon, or is s/he talking about how s/he's that extraterrestrial carnivorous purple unicorn? Most Otherkin identify as beings that are familiar to human mythology, or at least resemble them in some fashion. If someone comes in saying s/he's something that nobody has ever heard of, it's possible that s/he's trying to be more-special-than-thou, though as the "One-of-a-kind" section of Chapter 7 showed, this is not always the case. However, there are plenty of elves, wolves and vampires who are also playing the attention-seeking game, and for all we know that purple unicorn very well may have devoured others on Alpha Centauri.

Does s/he only talk about what type of 'kin s/he is, and no details on what it's like? "Attention-seeking ... [is] when one of the first and only things one hears from someone is about their status as whatever" is one tip from K.N. Indie agrees that "When some one babbles on constantly about their kin form...[it] sounds more like pain staking character creation". In this case it's quite possible that the person is fascinated by the idea of being Otherkin, but probably hasn't dug very deep into hirself yet.

Is s/he supposed royalty, or one of a very rare kind of something? Again, those who are just trying for attention will often try to be the most special of the special. They may say that they are a long-lost elven princess, or one of an elite death squad/circle of wizards/troop of rangers/etc. This also brings up our flavor-of-the-week claimant, who is a vampiric therian of dragon stock one week, and then a butterfly-winged velociraptor/jackalope combo the next. And there are those who tie being Otherkin to some huge mystical quest to save the Universe (that they, apparently, are the center of). Again, give the person some time to either find solid evidence to back up hir claims, or to grow out of the attention-seeking phase.

Does s/he claim to have some sort of amazing physical ability or "power"? Does s/he then not have any evidence to back up hir claims? Is s/he a therian who claims to be able to physically shift? Or a dragon who says s/he can really breathe fire? Unless s/he's got some pretty strong evidence, chances are s/he's making it up. While there are a few folks who have tried experimenting with minor physical changes, such as eye color, and some multiples report very subtle changes depending on who's fronting (many of which can probably be attributed to simple





posture differences), chances are slim that anyone can attain a full physical shapeshift into a wolf or other animal.

Does s/he pepper hir claims with terminology from roleplaying games or folklore? Jennifer gives examples: "the Veil" [a White Wolf RPG reference], fighting vampires, mages, or 'the wyrm' [another White Wolf reference]...anything to do with their power coming from the full moon (this excludes, of course, reasonable and well-defended arguments)". While there are magical practitioners who like using pop

culture symbolism in their magic, most people who jump into the Otherkin pool spouting obvious RPG or folkloric elements as pure truth are easily disproven.

Does s/he collect 'kin sides like some people collect bills? As Indie puts it, be wary "When a person seems to be one-upping other list members constantly. One day they are sidhe, next day some one posts about being a dragon with unusual powers and the sidhe suddenly finds a primordial soup aspect that can do EVERYTHING". This doesn't mean that there aren't people who are more than one type of 'kin, but anyone who claims the flavor of the week is pretty suspect. A related phenomenon is when a movie or popular book comes out that features nonhuman entities. Many "lycans" seem to have popped up after the movie *Underworld* came out, which uses the word "lycan" to describe werewolves. This doesn't mean that lycanthropy is impossible or that every self-described lican(thrope) is a poser, but be wary of anyone who resembles recent mainstream media (other than Mediakin).

Kaijima mentions one thing that sets off his radars: "Ultimately, what is most important to me in dealing with other people is that they're not using Otherkin or Therianthropy or any such as a shelter with which to justify bad attitudes." Does s/he use being Otherkin as an excuse for behavior that would otherwise be unacceptable in normal human society? Does s/he refer to the 'kin side as something that is separate from hir AND is out of hir control? (This does not include multiples, who maintain communication among the people in the system.) It's possible that s/he may still be used to the realization that s/he is Otherkin, but it's not an excuse to be harmful to one's self or others. If a supposed therian attacks someone in a fit of "bloodlust", nobody's going to back hir up in any convincing manner once the police show up to investigate.

Many Otherkin will gladly answer intelligent questions or polite criticisms about their being 'kin. Beware, however, "When they insist that they are RIGHT(tm) and have bad reactions to people who question or point out errors in their logic" as Indie observes. The process of questioning the self, whether those questions are prompted by yourself or by others, is a key part of the Awakening process. Those who avoid doubt are headed to delusion.

Please do keep in mind that these are general guidelines. I find it's best to take people on a case-by-case basis. And, sometimes, it's not always a matter of literal truth; K.N. says, "Mostly I tend to parse people's explanations of their otherkin status (or their multiplicity, or their experiences with the gods, or any of these other things) as ... structural metaphors, mythological expressions of their inner truths? (I tend towards a fairly Chaote outlook to back up my strong agnosticism; since these perceptions are impossible to verify, I judge them by whether or not they work.)" And Knife Smile makes a good observation as well:

There are those who might call me a poseur because the way I draw and represent my draconic aspect has changed a lot in the last ten years. This is solely because ten years is a hell of a lot of self-exploration time, though, and inevitably, you find out you were wrong about given details or discover more details as you go along, hence the changes. So I don't normally think about it too much when someone changes phenotype or gets more specific in it, unless the activity either happens too frequently with no real explanation or with suspicious timing (like for example all the 'wolves' who suddenly 'realised' they were 'really' coyotes around when Kyoh³⁴¹ started getting really popular for example,) or if the specification starts getting very strange and unlikely (dragon/wolf/vampire/fae/demon/angel/tiger/train/toad, or North Highland Golden-Faced Dire Wolf Canis dirus shanaurelius or something similarly invented.

Give others (and yourself) some time, trust your instincts and your own judgement, and keep in mind that to others, you may sound every bit as nutty as the other guy. Remember what I and Chris said about personal mythology, too—just because it may not be literally true doesn't mean there's not an equally useful metaphorical truth as well. Don't forget, either, that a lot of us when we first Awaken may have gone through an attention-seeking phase or other awkward growing pains. After all, I recall when I first "discovered" that the reason I liked wolves so much was because I was a real live werewolf, just like in *Werewolf: the Apocalypse*! It took me some time to grow out of it, but look where I am now! Maybe I'm still out of my gourd, along with the rest of the Otherkin community, but at least I got good company and a fun book to write out of it.

If you're going through the process of Awakening, don't feel rushed to have a "complete" story. There's no shame in saying "Well, I think I might be a pixie, but I also kind of resonate with the idea of sylphs, too." The only people who will fault you for not having a solid

³⁴¹ A popular artist known for her detailed depictions of anthropomorphic animals; her website is <http://www.kyoh.com/>

answer are those who are too insecure in themselves to admit their own doubts. Take your time, and...

Research, Research, Research

Labelling yourself as some flavor of Otherkin isn't just something to leap right into. Tirl makes a good point in "The Shadow of Myth":

*What do the labels really mean? Think carefully before you choose a label that has Power. Yes, they do, despite the way people treat them. Names have power, they influence how you think of yourself. Why do you think so many kin, pagans and other magically aware types take on a "username" that reflects more of how they see themselves?*³⁴²

Research is vital to the Awakening process. This includes not only books and other resources, but also seeking past life memories and other hints at your 'kin side.

There's a limited amount of hard copy published work on 'kin. My bibliography pretty much includes everything I found except for a couple works I didn't feel comfortable using as source material and a few books I didn't have the funds to purchase and which the local library had never even heard of. This is why I wrote this particular book, because there is such a dearth of published work on the subject of Otherkin. The internet, on the other hand, has a growing amount of material written by 'kin themselves. It varies in quality, of course, given that there's no editor of the Internet (nor should there be!). This means that you may have to wade through a lot of utter drek to get to the true gems. Feel free to peruse the bibliography; I've included some other recommended resources there as well.

Particularly with cases of personal mythology and energy resonance/soulbonding, works of fiction can be useful. Extra care needs to be taken with using these sources in regards to literal past/alternate lives, though—just because a story or setting sounds good doesn't mean that it's your story or setting. Most people indulge in escapism to one extent or another, and it's very easy for wishful thinking to become an excuse to wholesale acceptance of whatever you want to believe. This is why multiple forms of research are recommended, so you can check your results.

The books and websites need to be starting-places for you. Nobody can tell you how to be 'kin, or what your memories and experiences mean, except for you. Read the words of others and use

³⁴² Tirl, unknown

them as examples, but don't take them as the do-all and end-all of being 'kin. As Rexar says:

Read up on it to get a balanced, realistic perspective, because most likely somebody else has been thinking about it longer than you have, but ultimately the answer comes from within your own mind. That should be your primary source, because your mind, consciousness, and identity—your soul, if you will—is what it's about. That is where you should direct your observations, and it is from that which you should derive your ultimate conclusions.

If your 'kin side comes from reincarnation, your memories and experiences are most important in your self-discovery and it's vital that you research them thoroughly. Past-life regressions, whether guided or solitary, can connect you to past/alternate lives in which you were fully whatever your 'kin-self(s) is. Alternately, if you simply see your being 'kin as stemming from access to an archetype, you can view these memories as templates from which you can base your information about that part of yourself.

When accessing memories it's a good idea to try for repeat results. For example, if you see a certain place every time you access your memories, chances are good it's a true memory. Consistency is the key, though make sure that you enter every meditation with an empty mind so that you don't influence your findings with wishful thinking. If you're really picky, try using a simple divination tool like a pendulum to verify your results. Just keep that salt handy so you don't get too caught up in your work.

Some 'kin claim to share past life memories with others. This can be woven into quite a colorful history, and people can really feed on each others' stories. The problem with this is that it exacerbates the possibility of exaggerated results. Having someone tell you something that resembles a memory you haven't told anyone is a much more sure source than telling somebody "I remember this, this, and that" and having them echo "this, this, and that" right back at you. Solo mentions that it's a good practice to play your hand close, as it were: "We have indeed have had shared memories with some others, which is an interesting experience, and something we inspect closely to make sure we didn't inadvertently predispose others, which is why at times we tend to be very vague about what we disclose insofar as past-life memory."

Many survey respondents mentioned that it's a good idea to take your time with your memories, to not believe everything you think you remember, and to not get discouraged if it all doesn't come flooding back at once. As Tysha says, "One piece of advice I've given several people is try not to get stressed over your memories. I do feel who you are now is more important than who you were then."

It's also a good idea to examine your emotions and thought processes. For one thing you need to determine what exactly is 'kin-based and what's just a part of being human. Being moody and temperamental does not Otherkin make. Nor does being overly generous and self-sacrificing, or aggressive and belligerent. These are all normal human emotional patterns. You will find that some emotional and mental patterns are more connected to your 'kin side. They won't be universal to all 'kin, however, or even to all of your type. My wolf side may be a bitch in many ways, but there are plenty of gentle, patient therians as well.

On the other hand, certain traits may be clues to what you are. Skatche had a particularly unique method:

While researching otherkin, I decided to try on different archetypal personas in an effort to understand how an otherkin might think. The elf archetype fit so well that I decided I was potentially otherkin - I remained quite uncertain until months later, when I was able to confirm it with other people.

My thought processes and such never changed after Awakening. In fact, paradoxically, the reason I began to suspect I was an elf in the first place is that, when I adopted the archetype, I didn't have to change my thought processes at all.

You might also try having a conversation between your human and 'kin sides to try to clarify the relationship between the two. This will work even if you see yourself as a nonhuman trapped in a human body—you can personify your body and talk to it as a way of connecting to the human-derived world you live in and need to interact with at least on a basic level. Get into a comfortable position that you can hold for at least fifteen minutes. Close your eyes, and concentrate on being motionless while breathing deeply and slowly. Clear your mind of all thoughts, or as many as possible. Then picture a room, a field, or other neutral ground, with a personification of your human side and of your kin side(s). Have them converse amongst each other about what each brings to you, what confuses them about each other, and so forth. Remember, unless you're a multiple, these are just different parts of yourself—you won't develop dissociative disorder just by using this pathworking as a means of self-exploration.

Try keeping a journal of your findings. Don't fret if they change over time; it's natural. I have a journal from when I was 17 and just discovering my therian self. Needless to say, it's an amusing, if occasionally embarrassing, read—but it does remind me of how far I've come.

Also, don't assume that just any bit of information you get is automatically valid. Solo makes a great suggestion: "Beliefs are

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constantly tested for any weaknesses, and we generally function under the 'rule of four' which was a term developed by a close and dear friend and family member. This is basically when something occurs and is confirmed independently four times and/or by four independent external sources." Having a similar system in place can greatly improve your research results.

Network, Network, Network

One of the most valuable resources for Otherkin is—more Otherkin. Even if you aren't a social butterfly, it can still be a great comfort just knowing that someone else understands your worldview. And being around Otherkin gives you a safe space to be yourself in. I love being around people who accept the fact that sometimes I prefer to speak in growls and body language.

There are some organized groups out there; the majority of them center around vampires, though some of those are also open to all types of 'kin. There are too many to list, as I've said, but check local resources and online forums for information on contacting them. Most of them have websites, and some have listserves as well. You can also go to <http://groups.yahoo.com>, type in the name of the city nearest you (or your state or country) and the word "Otherkin" and see what comes up. You can also use those criteria in a search on <http://www.google.com>. Otherkin.net also has a directory of individuals as well as other community resources.

If you live in or near a city you may find small groups of Otherkin who meet more informally. I've managed to find Otherkin friends in every city I've lived in thus far, generally for the better. While having glamourbombing runs and dressing up as your Other self at Halloween/Samhain can be fun, sometimes it's just nice to be around someone who understand what it's like to be 'kin. Rumor said something in her survey similar to this that I loved:

On a local level, I've often found that the community is often just a bunch of people who get together and chat occasionally, go out to eat, see movies together. And this is perfect. If the online otherkin community can be overly abstract, nothing is more grounded than meeting Joe the Grocer, who is also an elf with two kids and a car payment due. I much prefer Joe the Grocer. The trick is in finding a local group in the first place.

Your search results will most likely bring up more online groups than in-person. The internet is a great tool in general, though as with anything online you do have to wade through some chaff to find the wheat.

Patience is key here. You may have to deal with some pretty odd characters (who may very well think you have a few screws loose yourself). But in time you'll find at least a few people you mesh with. Understand that they may physically live far away from you, but email makes communication over distances so much easier! Ignore the trolls (the annoying drama-inciting kind, not the trollkin) and concentrate on the positive aspects of the community.

In fact, it's pretty easy to get burned out on community in general. While there are a lot of good people involved, there are also some who will completely unsettle you. As happens with any group of people, cliquishness, infighting, and petty bickering can and do occur, and it can get frustrating. Take a break, and then try coming back. And, again, just remember to focus on the positive.

Of course, sometimes even taking a break doesn't help. Sometimes the online drama just gets to be too much—and there's nothing wrong with just stepping away from the computer for good. As Swift says:

Stay completely out of the online communities. They have nothing to offer you. I would be more happy today if I'd taken all the hours I wasted arguing on forums with nutcases and spent them volunteering at an animal rehab shelter, working for pay at a nursery, building rockets, getting a private pilot's license, or studying to build a portfolio I could offer a future employer. The communities foster freaks, trends, codependency, and serve only to fluff egos. It's better to go your own way and find your people in your chosen field. There are more there than you'd think. It's your favorite field for a reason.

Whether you agree with Swift's views on the online communities or not, it's still worth taking her point that Otherkin are all over the place in the real world. In addition, it's the internet. Very little that happens there can affect your life away from the keyboard. If you find yourself getting too wrapped up in flame wars and troll-baiting, give yourself a break. Try to avoid conversations that you know are just wastes of time (like responding to the person who spams your favorite list with "All Otherkin are weirdos!!!").

Also, in dealing with Otherkin both in person and online, don't assume that everyone who claims to be 'kin has automatically done years of soul-searching.

Mirror, Mirror...

It's common to "prove" one's Otherkin status through distinct traits that resemble the 'kin side. I might say I am a therianthrope because I have pointed canines, my eyes sometimes appear somewhat amber, my body is very wolflike (lean-muscled, leggy) and I've always walked on the balls of my feet ever since I had the balance to do so. In addition I prefer the intimacy of a pack environment to larger groups of strangers, I use both human and lupine vocalizations, and I'm very instinctual in my behaviors and reactions.

Now, these things can all be pointed to as "proof" that I am a therian. They can also be explained away as other things. All of the physical traits can be explained through simple human genetics, as many humans, my father included, carry them. The behaviors are also common within humans, and my life-long obsession with wolves has certainly colored my worldview. But the thing is...does it really matter whether my being therian caused those traits, or vice versa? The key, in my opinion, is how I can use those traits to further access and work with my wolf nature and balance it with my human nature.

Some 'kin bear no outward resemblance to their 'kin-selves, and yet they resonate internally to the point where they have no doubts whatsoever. While some 'kin do very much resemble their kin'selves physically in appearance and mannerisms, others do not, and this should not be taken as sole proof of being 'kin. On the other hand, I have found that the more developed one's 'kin self becomes the more its energy bleeds into the body and influences the physical aspects, if only through mannerisms. Still, resembling my 'kin side physically does not make me more legitimate than thou.

In addition, some people cite instances of chemical and other sensitivities supposedly associated with their mythological counterparts as proof of their 'kin sides. Vampires being sensitive to UV rays, faeries and elves having allergic reactions to iron, and therians being unable to wear silver are all common, though not universal, examples. In addition, some 'kin cite all sorts of health anomalies as assuredly associated with their being 'kin without even considering that they may have just been dealt a bad genetic hand or live in a harmful environment.

It is possible that some of these reactions are psychosomatic. If a person wants to be something badly enough, regardless of whether s/he really is or not, s/he may look for any reason to justify hir identity. Biologically, Otherkin are human; there is no single physical trait that all members of a type of 'kin possess. And until comparison testing is done between a control group of human and various groups of Otherkin to verify whether these conditions are more common in 'kin, physical symptoms should not be blamed on being Otherkin.

What About "Blend-a-Kin"?

Blend-a-kin is a sometimes derogatory term used towards those who identify as more than one 'kin. There are two firm camps in regards to this issue. The more skeptical folk are those who consider anyone with more than one 'kin-side as being the type of person who says, "I'm an elf-wolf-pixie-unicorn-dragon-tiger hybrid 'kin, and I know, 'cause my friend told me last week and she knows all kinds of stuff about magic!" On the other hand, Meiryra writes about the theory of soul fragments:

A friend of mine came up with the idea that there are very few purely human souls out there, and those that exist are either very young or very rare. That souls merge, or fuse; that souls shatter and those shards fuse with other souls in the reincarnating; that souls are constantly mixing and separating and melding and changing. And so we get mixtures. Human with a bit of elf, human with a portion of dragon, human with a large percentage of wolf; or the other way around, bird with a portion of human, cat with a bit of human.

In addition, some people just don't feel they fit into one single category. Knife-Smile carries both canine and dragon aspects, which he explains:

I am what I am. I will always be what I am, through all the physical existences I have and through the nonphysical nontimes I'll spend looking over my accumulated memories. The details will change; my essential nature won't. Though in the equivalent of ten thousand years I doubt I'll see myself as Wolf or Dragon anymore unless I spend a lot more time as both. I don't have 'sides' that are Other and Not Other. Though I do have different aspects to my personality that come up sometimes and which I identify and control via naming and characterising. They're very different from each other when you get down to it, but it's not any sort of 'multiple personality' thing, it's just a question of extremes. A Venn diagram is the best way to show it, I think -- most of the time, I hang around in the middle where the three overlap, just occasionally straying further into one aspect's jurisdiction than the others'. Occasionally, I get all the way into one particular aspect's range, and then I can seem to change dramatically.

Granted, there are newbies who do assume that any influence—from childhood memories to totemic bonds—is automatically proof of being Otherkin. It is unfair, however, to assume that anyone who is more than one flavor of 'kin is automatically a blend-a-kin. This, though, is again why I stress doing your research, both with books and with personal journeying, to clarify your thoughts and memories.

Just Because Someone Says You're Otherkin Does Not Make it So

This is a pretty common story. You're hanging out with your friends (some of whom may be Otherkin) when one of them says to you, "Hey, you like wolves a lot, and you move like one. I bet you're a werewolf!" This brings up a conversation that lasts for several hours, at the end of which you're absolutely convinced that they're right. You then leap in, paws-first, to the idea that you're really a wolf inside, even though you never had any inklings prior to the previous weekend.

While some people are good at sensing and decoding individual energy signatures, many are simply in need of the company of people like them. This may mean that a simple totemic bond with an animal, or a lifelong fascination with faeries, automatically gets turned into undeniable proof that you're Otherkin. This can then lead to trying to find any scrap of evidence you're 'kin, to the point of denying large quantities of evidence to the contrary. It can be tempting to try to validate yourself in any way possible, no matter how tenuous. But as Sa'arine says:

Ask yourself the reasons why you think so. Be sure you think you are because you really are, not because your friends are or because it looks so cool or because you need an escape from reality.

This isn't to say that there aren't people who can get a decent taste of someone else's energy and have a fair idea of what it is. I've met people, for example, whose energy pretty much screams "ELF!" or "DRAGON!" to just about anyone with a little sensitivity, and I also know people who have developed a knack for reading others and have a good track record.

There's also the question of whether one person can read another over the internet, either through pictures or writing. I've seen occasional threads on Otherkin message boards where someone will ask everyone else to look at a picture and see what impressions they get from reading the energy associated with it. On the one hand, this may seem about as sensible as choosing the person you want to marry by reading a bunch of names. However, as Daven pointed out to me, it's quite possible to read someone's energy well enough to read tarot over the internet successfully; the pictures are just a focus point. Silverin'a cautioned, "Reading someone's energy is tricky at best, and I would think it's especially what could be 'once removed' through the internet. That said, while I *think/feel* I can do so, it by no means indicates that I can, as I would need confirmation, and I haven't asked for any. I

wouldn't solicit any either as I feel each person needs to discover for themselves what's what, even though guidance may be beneficial"³⁴³

The other point I want to address in using the validation of others is shared memories. In the case of Arhuaine and her shared memories of skyhorses in Alorya that I mentioned back in chapter 2, she had recognized something she had discovered in her own memories a while before that someone else mentioned out of the blue later on. This is similar to the shared memories of the Elenari. And in cases of shared memories what is remembered is tested over and over again to be sure that it continues to hold water over time; not just anything is accepted just because it sounds right.

What I've been seeing now and then, both in person and on the internet, is one person saying "Okay, does anybody remember a race of blue dragons with fuschia wings and no eyes?" Then several other people will pop up and say "Oh, yeah, that sounds familiar!" when in fact they had never even thought of such a being until that very moment. This may seem like it solves the issue. However, people are incredibly suggestible, and a question like the one posed above is quite leading in nature. This sort of memory validation allows for very little criticism of memories; the rationalization usually runs along the lines of "Well, if someone else *says* they remember it, then it must be true because it's not just me!" Unfortunately this doesn't allow for people who (consciously or not) think that a blind blue and pink dragon just sounds cool, or who say that they remember to fit in or to mess with the querent.

A better example, similar to Arhuaine's anecdote, would be if someone started talking about the blind blue and pink dragons. Then perhaps another person who had previously seen these beings in their memories might speak up with the similarities and differences. Then these two people could do more memory retrieval independent of each other and compare notes. If the memories still seem to resemble each other, they can then somewhat safely assume that there's some shared experience there. Another possibility is for a number of people of the same type of (reincarnated) Otherkin to each write down their own memories in as much detail as they can and then see if any patterns come up.

In the end self-exploration is key. As a large portion of survey respondents mentioned, you are the only one who can truly decide whether you're Otherkin or not. Seek the nonhuman elements within yourself, explore them, and identify them. None of these things can be done for you. This doesn't mean you can't seek advice from other

³⁴³ Daven and Silvaerin'a, personal communication, January 1, 2007

people, of course. Just don't let someone else decide for you who you really are. You are the final judge of that.

Is it Possible to Stop Being Otherkin?

If you'll recall, back in the vampire chapter I discussed the idea of "curing" vampirism. There's additionally the question of whether one can be "cured" of being Otherkin in general. After all, while most Otherkin are pretty content being what they are, it's not unheard of for someone to wish they were just human and nothing else.

Some people see it as a hardwired part of who you are. You can stop identifying as Otherkin, but you don't stop being 'kin. Violin Goddess echos the opinion of a number of Otherkin in this respect:

I believe that you cannot stop being otherkin. It is something that you were born into. It is a part of who you are, your soul, your heart, your mind, intrinsically. You can deny it all you want, or just stop believing it, but that doesn't stop you from being who you are. Who you always have been.³⁴⁴

On the other hand, Ravenari brings up an interesting idea:

It's possible to stop being 'anything' at some point, you can change your eye colour, you can get surgical hair plugs to permanently change the colour of your hair, you can suppress sexuality (which stops its external manifestation, and often dulls down its internal too), facets of identity, gender, etc. Theoretically in my practice, and in many shamanic practices, it is possible to lose parts of our soul and spirit. Our therian side, or the part of us that we identify as being 'other' is part of our soul - it's not hardwired in our DNA, because otherwise scientists would have noticed that we were part animal - and therefore can also simply be lost, carved off, or removed. Granted we may not feel whole afterwards, and we may even become sick, just as we do when we lose other parts of our spirit, and we probably spend our entire lives at least unconsciously seeking that part of us out again. But I do think it's possible to 'lose' the 'kin part of our spirit that allows us to identify with and healthily manifest our 'kin side.'³⁴⁵

Liesk maintains that it could be possible, though not exactly easy, from a psychological/neurobiological stance:

If your views of yourself change to the degree you stop perceiving all the parts of yourself that you see as non-human and instead identify them as human, that

³⁴⁴ Violin Goddess, personal communication, September 19, 2006

³⁴⁵ Ravenari, personal communication, September 19, 2006

probably would exempt you from Otherkinness. This wouldn't cause your hardwired psychology, which IMO [in my opinion] is probably what caused the sense of non-humanity to begin with, to change in any fashion. Possibly, you could experience something that in fact is capable of changing that hardwiring. If this happens suddenly, such as from a traumatic injury to the brain that results in loss of memories and personality changes, then of course there's a question of if you'd still be the same person or not. On the other hand, it could occur slowly over time. We now know that the brain continues to reshape itself long past adolescence, so I think it's possible that someone could gradually become less and less identified with their non-humanity as a product of their literal states changing.³⁴⁶

Jarandhel has this to say on the matter:

*I still see otherkin as literally that... kin to that which is Other. And because of that, I believe one can stop being otherkin. If one is kin to the other in the sense of being their kindred, then kinship bonds can be broken. Divorce, disowning and similar rituals have always existed for this, and for many simple estrangement can suffice in the absense of formal ritual. Alternatively, if one is kin to the other in the sense of being alike to it, one can stop being otherkin when one is no longer like it. For an example, let us take a common form of otherkin: elves. If one is elf-kin in the sense that they are kindred to elves, that relationship can be severed by either party. And if one is elf-kin in the sense that one is elf-like, then should one stop being elf-like then one would have stopped being elf-kin.*³⁴⁷

So if you stop believing in faeries, will your fey side go “poof”? As is evident from the quotes above, opinions vary widely on this idea. A lot hinges on what you believe “causes” Otherkin. Reincarnation and genetics are a permanent part of a person, something that's there whether you accept it or not—or so the argument goes. However, if you work with the theories of energy resonance or personal mythology, then shifting your energy signature or rewriting your mythology can remove being Other from your life. Additionally, theories such as reincarnation and genetics at this point still do require an amount of belief due to a lack of empirical evidence.

Vampires are a special case; if vampirism is caused by an imbalance or deficiency in the ability to process energy, then theoretically there are ways to correct it. This is not entirely out of line. Indeed, there are cases of vampires who essentially cured themselves, for all intents and purposes. Jack Dracona explains in two essays how, through energy work and consciously separating that energy work from the vampire mythos, he removed his need to feed on energy. While he

³⁴⁶ Liesk, personal communication, September 18, 2006

³⁴⁷ Jarandhel Dreamsinger, personal communication, September 19, 2006

still can work with energy, it's no longer necessary for him to supplement his own energy with outside sources. In addition he cites another former vampire who healed herself through her Reiki attunements which maintained her energy levels while her body returned to a healthy state.³⁴⁸ And, as I discussed in the theories chapter, it's possible that at least some cases of vampirism can be eliminated through energy work.

While these theories are largely untested, the examples of sanguine vampires who have overcome their need for blood, such as Mora above, show that fundamental changes are possible. If the dependency for energy of a certain type can be shifted with enough effort, then it's plausible that the need could be altered even more drastically, even to the point of eliminating the need entirely. If we accept that a vampire might be created, as per Kaldera's secondary vampirism, it is also plausible that a vampire could be cured.

There is the argument that if you can stop being Otherkin, vampire or otherwise, then you were never really Otherkin in the first place. If I may interject a blatant opinion in here, this sounds like a cop-out, as it doesn't allow room for further discussion. It resembles some of the arguments in witch hunts a few centuries ago—toss the witch into the water. If s/he floats, s/he's a witch. If not—oops, well, s/he wasn't a witch, but at least we know for sure! In the same way it's assumed that if a person's experience as Otherkin can be negated, then *obviously* it wasn't genuine (and s/he'll hit bottom just like any “ordinary” human).

Being Otherkin is often likened to being gay, or straight, or bisexual, or any other sexuality. The argument is made that both are a hardwired part of you that you can deny but never change. While this is true in some cases, it is not universal. In the case of my own sexuality, I have identified at different parts of my life as lesbian, straight, bisexual, and pansexual. I don't believe that any of these labels was inappropriate, or a compromise, or just a phase; instead, they reflected my romantic/sexual attractions at the time, and I am not alone in this. I also know of one magician who, as an experiment, deliberately (and successfully) shifted his sexuality from heterosexual to bisexual, just to see if he could do it. Wetzel recommends just such a change as a method of proving to yourself just how flexible the idea of “you” really is.³⁴⁹

Some people, particularly those involved in more evolutionary uses of magic and occultism, have observed that the psyche is much more malleable than is often thought. In my own experiences with personality aspecting I've found that this is the case. With enough effort and conscious manipulation of the psyche, there's nothing that is truly

³⁴⁸ Dracona, unknown

³⁴⁹ Wetzel, 2006, p. 108

permanent; we are capable of all emotions, thoughts, opinions and beliefs.

Even genetics aren't necessarily unbendable; Ellwood mentions in *Inner Alchemy* that he has an inherited predisposition towards depression that led him to begin researching methods of overcoming it without drugs, leading to much of the material in his book.³⁵⁰ As of this writing he has been free from depression for a number of years and is much more capable of consciously handling his emotions. Saying that one must be Otherkin because of an inherited condition is like saying we are all slaves to our biology; it is an influence, yes, but we can change how strong that influence is.

As far as reincarnation goes, if we really do have past/alternate lives, there's no law that says that they have to continue affecting us. Just as we can work through and deprogram conditioning and imprints from this life, so can we do the same with other lives. Even ceasing to believe in their effects can drastically reduce their effect on you.

On the other hand, is this really a good idea? For many Otherkin, accepting the Other is much healthier than denying it, regardless of origin. I can say from my own experiences that during the times I denied being a therianthrope, I felt dissatisfied with myself and my life, as if something was missing. Allowing myself the belief in therianthropy answered and quelled that dissatisfaction. However, I've never tried actively deprogramming (as opposed to simply *repressing*) my lupine nature, and really have no reason to. I feel pretty certain that had I had access to things such as metaprogramming, Leary's Eight Circuit model of consciousness, and other tools that I have used to modify myself psychologically, that I could have also deprogrammed that dissatisfaction. Whether that would have made me longer a wolf at all is another question entirely.

This still leaves the question: even if you don't believe it, can you still be Otherkin? For those who see being Otherkin as something that is an integral part of you, whether through past or genetics or neurobiology or whathaveyou, the answer is yes. However, if you reduce the influence that being Otherkin has on you to nothing, then you may as well not be Otherkin, and the issue becomes one of semantics.

If you want to try "deprogramming" or "removing" your Other self, the first thing to do—and possibly the only thing—is to stop believing that you are Otherkin. Cease any behaviors and activities that you associate with being Other, and disassociate yourself from the community (with the exception of people you'd consider friends regardless of your own identity). Pick up a few books on self-programming; I recommend Ellwood's *Inner Alchemy*, Robert Anton

³⁵⁰ Ellwood, 2007, p. 15-17

Wilson's *Prometheus Rising* and *Quantum Psychology*, John C. Lilly's works on metaprogramming, and Christopher S. Hyatt's *Undoing Yourself With Energized Meditation and Other Devices*. Wetzel's *The Paradigm Pirate* includes an excellent series of magico-psychological rituals/exercises designed for personal metamorphosis which may be helpful to those of a more occult bent.³⁵¹ Additionally, you may want to have something to fill in the gap left by the Otherkin identity, and be prepared to spend a prolonged amount of time on this process.

Be aware that this may not necessarily work, nor may it be a good idea. I make no guarantees as to the effectiveness of these ideas, not having gone through them myself—or known anyone who used them—specifically for the purpose of deprogramming my wolf self. And, ultimately, it may not affect what you are, but it may certainly help remove its influence on who you are.

It's Okay to Have Your Head in the Clouds as Long as Your Feet are Planted Firmly on the Ground

It's incredibly easy to get wrapped up in the novelty and romanticism of being something other than human. This is normal. After all, most of us have vivid imaginations that we use to offset the boredom of the everyday world on a regular basis. In being 'kin we can come to the realization that to an extent our fantasies are reality. The problem is when fantasy becomes escapism, which then leaks over into that everyday life.

For a lot of people part of being 'kin is accepting that, like it or not, you've been incarnated in this particular section of space/time. While your interpretation of it may be vastly different from that of a mundane human being it is vital that you don't become detached from this world. Much of what is actual insanity involves the lack of interaction with this world, and if you allow yourself to drift too far away from it, whether you're 'kin or not, eventually someone's going to take notice.

Dressing in odd clothing, using archaic words, or filling your cubicle with faerie statues might make people think you're a little strange, but few will actually consider you to be a danger. However, getting really lost in yourself can have some frightening results. For instance, if your 'kin side starts urging you to harm people it's time to get some help, and I'm not talking about getting in contact with your ancestors. And I hate to disappoint people, but don't expect any major

³⁵¹ On the other hand, if you wish to not divorce yourself from that which is Other, these books are also excellent tools in helping you become even more comfortable in yourself, regardless of who and what you are.

deviations from the laws of physics; quantum theory is fun and makes sense to a lot of people, but it's not going to help you physically shapeshift into another species, make you more powerful than a locomotive, or able to run faster than a speeding bullet.³⁵²

I'm not saying don't have an imagination, or don't think of yourself in a romanticized manner. Gods know I've daydreamed some otherwise boring hours away by running as a wolf through the forests in my head. And the suspension of disbelief helps us to access our 'kin sides in safe space like gathers or our own homes. Just don't let your imagination get in the way of things like having a job, interacting with people that may very well not know of your nonhuman side, or even something as simple as walking across a busy street.

One practice you may find useful is giving yourself periodic times when you simply allow yourself to be purely 'kin. This may involve going to a gathering, hanging out with friends who are 'kin or 'kin-friendly, going out to the woods or another safe, secluded spot, or just taking time throughout the day to see things solely through the eyes of what is not human about you. This helps to retain the balance within yourself, and can be a lot of fun if you're safe about it. (This means keeping things like howling at the moon restricted to places where you're not likely to be heard or found!)

I'd also recommend reading Ellwood's essay, "Otherkin Identity: Is it more than just a label?" at <http://www.otherkin.net/articles/identity.html>. He makes some good points regarding the nature of identity and labeling, as well as the affects that culture can have on memories and imagination. It's a good perspective that makes you think without being too incredibly skeptical.

*Oh No! The World/Universe/Multiverse is Coming to an End,
Unless I Can Stop it!*

Everybody's seen and/or heard at least one of these stories. A (usually newly Awakened) 'kin of some flavor realizes that s/he is one of the centerpieces in a highly important conspiracy or war conveniently placed on a plane other than the one we're currently manifested on. The individual—often backed by others who claim to be privy to the same information—then goes on to warn everyone about the impending doom and asks if anyone else has noticed "anything strange" lately.

The most common story is of a great war that threatens to spill over into our world. It can be a war between Seelie and Unseelie elves, angels and demons of various religions, vampires and werewolves,

³⁵² With apologies to Superman

dragons and gryphons, and so on. Of course, even the members of those species who happen to be spending a life incarnated as humans must be involved. And of course, the war could very well lead to mass destruction of the world/universe/multiverse. There are also great quests that involve finding everything from the Holy Grail (Monty Python, eat your heart out!) to locating the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (one of whom was apparently residing in Wisconsin). And then there are the petty squabbles over territory, and long-lost love triangles that have been agonizing their participants for lifetimes.

Sometimes roleplaying game material gets dragged, piecemeal or wholesale, into the bargain. As mentioned earlier, my early explorations into otherkin were all tangled up with RPGs. At the tender young age of seventeen, stuck in a small town with hardly any resources beyond Montague Summers' *The Werewolf*, I was fully convinced that I was a Child of Gaia Philodox straight out of White Wolf's *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*. I counted as friends another were, a vampire, and a faerie-blooded vampire hunter (who somehow never attacked our vampire friend). And, of course, we were at war with a rival group of local vampires and werewolves who never seemed to manifest physically, though we seemed to experience an awful lot of psychic attacks, complete with Salem-witch-trial-style convulsions and panic attacks. Thankfully, I grew out of it pretty quickly.

Now, I'm not writing about this in order to belittle the people who make such sweeping claims. For all I know there could be a heavenly war that threatens to end all existence as we know it. But I doubt that the majority of these suspicions have any meat to them. This is a common trend, particularly among the newly Awakened. It appears to be a combination of everyday escapism and "Hey, there's something different about me—I bet I'm more different than anyone else!" Most people grow out of it within a reasonable time, and rarely does anyone come to any true harm.

If you have one of your own tales to tell, don't feel bad. More of us than will admit it have been through that phase. And yeah, it's just a phase. Just relax. You're coming to realize that you are different, but don't go overboard. Remember Occam's Razor—the simplest answer is the most likely. You're probably not being psychically attacked; rather, you may just be more sensitive to energy fluctuations. Some people, during the process of Awakening, do become more sensitive to energy in general, though this also happens when you start practicing magic, or otherwise allow yourself to be more aware of the nonphysical world. Brushing against a spirit accidentally doesn't mean a noncorporeal vampire is draining you. As the Shards recommend, "Do not mistake coincidence for synchronicity - sometimes unusual things happen around you FOR NO REASON AT ALL. That is the way of the

universe." Breathe, reread the section on personal mythology in chapter 2, and keep going with your life. This world has adventures enough without creating more to deal with.

Humans Have Magic, Too

One of the most common reasons given by new seekers as to why they think they're Otherkin is "Because I just feel different from everyone else". Well, yes, you feel different from most of the population, as do most Otherkin. But then again there are plenty of perfectly human individuals who also feel alienated from mainstream society. Hell, feeling like nobody understands you is a normal part of being a teenager (a stage that can last well into your twenties and beyond).

Being attracted to magic, paganism and nature also isn't necessarily grounds for being Otherkin. Otherwise you could have some lively discussion about what sort of 'kin Aleister Crowley was (Not that that wouldn't be a fun topic to peruse, in my opinion.). Certainly there are a proportionately high number of magic users among Otherkin, pagan and otherwise. And there are many Otherkin for whom magic is a natural ability attached to their 'kin-side. But there's also a significant number of Otherkin who don't practice magic at all, as well as those who don't believe in it whatsoever. In addition, having animals take an instant like (or dislike) to you isn't necessarily because you're 'kin. Animals read a lot into body language and scents, things that we tend to miss. There are just as many cases of humans being good (or not) with animals.

Speaking of humans, it can be deceptively easy to fall into the attitude of "Otherkin are better than humans because we're all nice/we're better to the environment/we don't start wars/insert excuse here". This can lead to quite a superiority complex, accompanied by a lot of blind spots. First off, there are more than enough Otherkin who are lying, quarrelsome, and otherwise generally unpleasant assholes. And not all Otherkin live in environmentally responsible ways.

This attitude is harmful in two ways. First, it perpetuates "Us vs. Them" mentality. The Otherkin who claim to be pacifists, in particular, ought to be wary of this sort of divisiveness, as it is at the root of the majority of conflicts large and small, be they nationalistic, racist, religious, or otherwise. Second, those who strive for recognition and acceptance in mainstream society would do best to avoid these attitudes. After all, we can't expect people to be tolerant of us if we are not tolerant of them.

Finally, keep in mind that genetically, we're all human, and we do live in a human society. (For those who claim other-than-human genetic quirks, you're still primarily biologically human and would most likely

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get a "human" result on any DNA test, with or without weird quirks.) Even if you could go out and live off the land completely isolated from all humans, it wouldn't stop the fact that your body and your perceptions are still largely human—for example, while a therian in a mental shift may experience a temporarily heightened sense of smell (or at least heightened perception thereof), no therian has nearly as good a sense of smell as a wolf or deer.

Some people question the validity of Otherkin because we don't have the "powers" associated with our Other selves. A cheetah therianthrope may be a fast runner, but s/he isn't going to be able to hit 70mph. Similarly, someone whose Other self is a dragon can't fly, breathe fire, or protect himself from damage with tough scales. This doesn't mean that we aren't what we say we are. However, remember the point that was made in "Kin to the Other"—one does not have to be something in order to be kin to it. Yes, we have human limitations. But that doesn't make us, at our cores, any less what we identify as. It's the same issue with transgendered people; a female-to-male transgendered person who has not had a sex change operation is still a woman, not a man, because that is what she identifies as. Some may argue that fact, but the situation is the same—her body may not exactly match who she, the person is, but we are not defined by our bodies alone.

Sheena, who is fae, has this to say on the subject: "All joking aside, I identify with fae self as one half of a whole. I am mortal, yes, but this soul my meager human one is bolstered with is much, much older, and wiser. I couldn't survive with one half or the other half...so I am me, and that is all there is on matters." On the other hand, it's quite possible to acknowledge your uniqueness without being superior about it. Sarah says, "I now sometimes see myself as apart from humanity...not better or worse, but separate."

Keep in Mind That Non 'Kin Often See Us as Complete Lunatics

It may be tempting, especially when first Awakening, to want to tell everybody about being a phoenix, or an elf, or a demon. Sure, it's an exciting thing to suddenly feel like everything makes more sense. There are even those pushing for public acceptance of Otherkin, to be recognized as a minority.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of society doesn't agree. Responses usually range from askance glances to outright mockery. The concept of not being human is relegated to the psychiatric ward. Romanticized ideas of reintroducing the magic of imagination and wonder to the world usually run up against the gray concrete slabs of materialism and scientism.

A quick look at <http://www.urbandictionary.com> produces the following commentary by site users:

Crazy people on the internet who desperately try to make themselves seem cool by claiming to be a reincarnated version of some kind of popular, charismatic animal or a monster they heard about in a roleplaying game. Usually they justify this by insisting their daydreams have some kind of bearing on the real world. It generally does not work, except with fellow otherkin and of course furies. —tengu shoes

A bunch of degenerate role-players that appeared during the advent of the internet and role playing games. Evidence points towards them as being escapist (i.e., a person who tries to escape the pressures of their life through non-orthodox methods), though they fervently deny this. They bitch about the human race and their "wrong" ways. Also they are depressed over the fact that they are not whatever the hell they like to role-play. This also shows more evidence of escapism. Otherkin are also a bunch of hypocrites because if you do not believe the bullshit that they tell people you are a "mundane close minded [sic] human." —kharne

Typically, an overweight web designer (i.e. unemployed) adolescent who discovered the reason they were bullied as a child was due to the fact they are spiritually a reincarnated dragon, angel, vampire and/or axe-faxd unicorn demi-god, and not because almost all children are bullied at one stage or another. —Otherkin4breakfast³⁵³

Even those who are friendlier still have criticisms. An anonymous correspondent says:

In general? I don't trust the movement or the community. I think it is incredibly divisive, in a time when we fringe elements should really be sticking together if we want to achieve any legitimacy. Instead of focusing on what we have in common, the Otherkin community as a whole obsessively focuses on what they perceive as different, and that's almost never good for a community—it hamstrings our unity before we can get anything done. In specific, there are a lot of people who identify as otherkin that I really like and count among my friends. In short, it's the group I don't trust, not the individuals.

Others may simply see us as misinterpreting spiritual matters. It's sort of a "You say to-MAY-to, I say to-MAH-to" issue. Some people think that we're putting emphasis on a phenomenon that is more widespread than we realize, that there are people who are attuned to certain energies or entities or past lives who don't feel the need to call it by any name. Freeman remarks:

³⁵³ Anonymous, 2006-1

I'm 54.4% convinced that the Otherkin phenomenon is a matter of heightened sensitivity to part of the common heritage of humanity. I have wolf and snake spirits as part of my makeup, but I don't identify with those so intently (except when I actually invoke them) that it would occur to me to label myself with a special name because of those particular indwelling essences. We all contain multitudes. The other 45.6% is divided into a 41.2% allowance for the fact that I may be missing something, either because of perspective or because what I have seen of the Kin communities online (and slightly in person) hasn't provided any better explanation, and 4.4% for it being a case of psychic obsession brought on by the lack of support and understanding for shamanic experience in the overculture.³⁵⁴

DragonScholar (who is not dragonkin, despite the name) adds:

Technically, if people are non-species-based reincarnationalists, we're ALL Otherkin in one way or another. I don't see this addressed as much. I sort of wonder why - I mean technically if my soul has evolved, it wasn't always human. I'd like to see more on this subject.³⁵⁵

Some non-'kin may initially look askance at Otherkin, but eventually figure that this is who we are, and that's alright. They may even ask questions about what it's like to be Otherkin. At any rate, they're good people to have around, because it is a definite advantage to have the human perspective on things. I've found people who aren't involved in the Otherkin subculture at all can have excellent perspectives, especially if I'm getting a little too wrapped up in myself. But even these tolerant folk may need a period of time to digest the information, as Dawa Lhamo mentions:

When I first encountered 'kin online (in 2001), I thought they were rather, um... "touched" in the head... So then I completely forgot about them until about a year later, when I came across the same website again. And I was surprised, reading through the essays and such, that these people actually seemed like they questioned themselves and explored themselves. And that made me think, "Maybe there's something to this"... So I joined an Otherkin email list, and poked around. Sure there were a few who were "whacked-out", but for the most part, I've found 'kin to be remarkably down to earth, to be very much in touch with their own selves, and to challenge themselves and their assumptions regularly. Since then, I've had a number of real-life friends come out to me as 'kin. And it's been a growing experience, even for myself, just talking with them and getting to know them. So yes, I think this Otherkin phenomenon has at the very least *some* truth to it because it seems to

³⁵⁴ Freeman, personal communication, February 20, 2006

³⁵⁵ DragonScholar, personal communication, February 20, 2006

*really work for some people. And besides, who am I to think I know everything about existence? Put simply, why not?*³⁵⁶

Needless to say, approach the subject with non-'kin cautiously. Even among more tolerant subcultures, such as the neopagan community, there are those who simply think we're out of it. If you decide to tell your ultra-fundamentalist family member, or the popular kids at school, or your coworkers, that you're Otherkin, don't be surprised if the reaction is less than what you expected. Give people time to come to terms with the issue. After all, for most people it's a pretty severe paradigm shift. Expecting all of your coworkers to automatically accept you as an elf isn't very realistic; you're bound to get people gossiping about you. In these cases, discretion may be the best path to take. Finding one or two good friends you can confide in is a much more realistic option, especially if you take your time with it.

This doesn't mean, however, that being Otherkin automatically makes you a target for anyone beyond the occasional bully or internet troll. Which leads to...

THEY Are Not Out to Get You

Remember back in Chapter 1 when I said that a person is more likely be assaulted or killed for being transgendered than Otherkin? It still holds true. Unfortunately, there is a trend among some subcultures to exaggerate their place in the grand scheme of things. For example, after the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center devastation and the subsequent Patriot Acts, the internet was full of neopagans panicking about how the government was going to shut down every pagan store, gathering, and circle. Suffice it to say, so far the government has been a lot more interested in people of Middle Eastern descent and/or Islamic beliefs than in pagans. And as for the Religious Right, with rare exception they've got their hands full enough with trying to dampen the rights of anyone who isn't strictly heterosexual to worry about what the witches are up to. But whenever any threat, no matter how small, targets pagans, there is always the vocal minority who is automatically up in arms saying how the government/Christianity/etc. are out to get us all, and next it'll be lynching in the streets. As a pagan myself, until people stop protesting the efforts to reinstate school prayer or make Christianity the national religion of the U.S., I'm not too worried. I'd say with the current political climate it's a lot more dangerous to be a Moslem than a pagan.

³⁵⁶ Dawa Lhamo, personal communication, February 20, 2006

The same goes for Otherkin. It's tempting to make more of us than is really necessary, partially because some of us seek identity as a group. Since most people have never heard of us, and those that do think we're a bunch of seriously cracked pots, it may seem easy to jump to conclusions about what would happen once we're more well-known. But a few (non-'kin) trolls on the internet do not equal a concerted effort to rid the world of Otherkin. The people in the government likely have the same viewpoint of us as everyone else—either they don't know about us, or they think we're nuts, but not really worthy of investigation. I don't think the Religious Right has a clue about us.

Honestly, about the only way at this point that Otherkin could be seen as a threat by any non 'kin is if there became a connection between crime and 'kin. There haven't, however, been any 'kin organizations that have been exposed in any major scandals, and the closest thing to 'kin being involved individually in any noteworthy crime were the vampire murders in 1996. This didn't involve actual Otherkin, but instead roleplayers gone over the edge who killed one of the members' parents after they initiated her into their group with a blooddrinking ritual. Still, the vampirism was nothing more than symbolism that gave form to full-blown insanity.³⁵⁷

If someone created a highly visible religious cult around Otherkin it would only be a matter of time before the same folks who worry about the goings-on of the Hare Krishnas had a new target. Still, given the fact that Otherkin are no more prone to crime than any other sector of society, and that 'kin are notoriously hard to organize, the chances of anyone beyond a few people on different fringes than ours seeing us as a serious problem are slim to none. In the event that we did become more well-known as a group, it's likely that we'd go through the same growing pains as other subcultures such as neopagans and furies—initial shock and small-scale discrimination, but fewer problems and more acceptance as time went on and people found other things to be shocked by.

Serious Threats

As nice as it would be to say that all Otherkin are well-adjusted, harmless members of society, unfortunately this isn't the case. While truly dangerous people are very much a minority within this subculture, the occasional whack job does exist.

As with any collection of people of any type, occasionally you'll find groups that turn into cults (and these need not necessarily be religious cults, either). If you're concerned about a particular group,

³⁵⁷ Melton, 1999, 714-715

check out the Advanced Bonewits Cult Danger Evaluation Frame by Isaac Bonewits at <http://www.neopagan.net/ABCDEF.html>.

If a group makes you uneasy, just stay away. However, this doesn't give you free rein to automatically badmouth anyone, particularly if you don't have any solid evidence of a wrongdoing. "They're strange" does not equal "They're an evil, brainwashing cult that molests children and eats babies!"

On the other hand, if someone threatens you or harms you, you have every right to report them to the police. Their being 'kin does not make them above the law. Granted, it may be rather embarrassing to explain the situation, but it's not worth getting hurt—or worse—over.

This brings me to the topic of hunters. Hunters (also known as slayers, thanks to the popularity of the *Buffy* movie and TV series) have enough of a presence that they've made it into the Sanguinarius.org glossary:

*A loud-mouthed dumbass that makes public and obnoxious claims of killing people who are (or who the slayer thinks are) vampires...If they are posers, then they will continue to remain free and flap their lips a lot; if they are real, then the Law will deal with them accordingly.*³⁵⁸

Two cases in my own experience spring immediately to mind. One was a guy who considered himself a martial arts expert by virtue of earning a blue belt in *tae kwon do* as a kid. If you walked up behind him and said "Boo" he'd whirl around and affect a stance, as if he was poised to *karate-chop* you any second. He also carried a pencil-sized piece of balsa wood sharpened to a point in his inner coat pocket, just in case a particularly tough vampire got past his amazing skills. The other was a rather odd fellow who was a flavor-of-the-week 'kin. One week he claimed to be a *Vampire Hunter D*-style dhampir (vampire/human hybrid). He figured he could learn to be a real ninja by watching Chuck Norris in *Walker, Texas Ranger*. Of course, the next week he claimed to be a full-blown vampire himself—go figure.

Needless to say, between these two characters and the rest I've run into, there really doesn't seem to be much threat from the "hunters". They strike me as people whose mundane lives aren't nearly interesting enough and who have a serious lack of attention. Still, there's always that one in a million chance you'll meet that one person who's just psycho enough to try something, so take any threats against your life or limb as seriously as you would with any non-'kin.

Wash, Rinse, Repeat

It's very common to go through one or more periods of denial over the years. Believe it or not, this is perfectly healthy. When you deny any other option than what you want to hear, that's when delusion starts to set in.

In fact, from the start it's a good idea to question yourself. As you go through each round of questioning, you'll find certain ideas that continue to survive. These are the ones to pay attention to. If your results vary over time, this is not a bad thing. Just be patient with yourself and keep in mind that everyone goes through periods of doubt.

On the other hand, Otherkin with mental conditions do exist. Rather than being automatically discarded as a possibility, though, it should be explored as thoroughly as any other potential explanation. If you're healthy, then so much the better. If not, it doesn't necessarily mean you're not Otherkin, but it does mean you may need help (more about this in a minute). As Tygermoon Foxx remarks:

[I]f you have mental illness GET IT TREATED. It won't change the fact that you're Otherkin and it WILL give you the tools you need to cope with being Otherkin. Don't use your uniqueness as an excuse to behave unacceptably or to live off of the efforts of others.

In the end, once the storm has gone away and the rain has drained into the streams, you'll find the most solid material left drying in the sun. Think of the questioning process as similar to tempering steel. It is heated numerous times, pounded with a hammer, but with the ordeal it becomes stronger. And don't let your doubt get to you too much. CUSM puts it very well:

You know what you are. It is the thing that will not go away. It is what you see when you look at yourself from within. You are not crazy. All magicians are crazy. Everyone is a magician. Don't stare at the paradox, just ride it to the Next Level. Reality is what you make of it. Make it good.

Don't Take Yourself Too Seriously

Some Otherkin seem to have lost their sense of humor. Others get entirely too wrapped up in their personae and think that being 'kin gives them special privileges. And there are those who simply lose touch with reality in a rather harmless, if irritating, manner.

As noted above, a large portion of the population doesn't take us seriously, either. A few of these individuals love nothing more than to

bait online communities just to get a rise out of people. They're the ones who come on and say "Otherkin are just delusional psychotics who roleplay too much!" and then sit back and watch the resultant uproar.

It's easy to get angry at these people. But it's a lot more fun to laugh at them—and at yourself. Sure, you just got insulted. You're tempted to respond with a snarling reply about how closed-minded they are, and how dare they come into your territory and tell you that you're worthless? But honestly, are these flame war inciters really worth your time beyond a giggle at how pathetic they really are? Sometimes it's worth it, too, to look at yourself from their point of view, and get a bit of amusement out of just how absurd the situation really is. After that, just accept things the way they are, keep exploring yourself, and get on with your life.

Be careful, too, of being too egotistical. You may have been a royal dragon in a past life, but in modern American society, at least, the ideal is of equality (in theory, if not always in practice). Your titles and accomplishments from the past have no bearing here. Respect has to be earned; it's a privilege, not a right (Another analogy, for those of you familiar with the BDSM scene, think of the dominant who walks in and expects every submissive in the room to automatically refer to him as Master/Mistress and do whatever s/he bids.).

In either case, humility is one tool you should never leave out of your utility belt. Teriel says, "Question, be skeptical, test...and don't get caught up in yourself...just because you were an elf lord in one life doesn't give you the right to be an ass to people."

It's Okay To Ask For Help

Despite all that I've said about your search being a personal one, you can get advice from others. Just keep in mind that others can't tell you what you are—they can only give you the tools to determine that. I find that talking to other Otherkin when I have a problem, even if it's only somewhat related to being a therian, does help. Of course, these are people who I know well and trust. But as much as we are sometimes encouraged to be rugged individualists, it's important to remember that it's not weak to ask for help.

Be advised that forums, message boards and other public or semi public virtual realities may be host to all kinds of folks, including those who look for vulnerabilities in others. You might go onto one of these media and post an introduction, along with "Hey, I want to talk to somebody about my situation, but I'm a little nervous about talking about it here. Could I email someone who's willing to listen?" Or, if there are regular gatherings in your area, get to know the people there and then once you made some friends, if you feel safe, open up to them.

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You may already be fortunate enough to have a friend or two (or more) who are Otherkin themselves, and more experienced than you.

What you want to avoid is asking others to feed you instant answers about yourself, and asking people to verify your experiences. The best way to word things is to introduce yourself if you haven't already, explain what you think you may be, and why. However, this should not be your first action once you've gotten the idea of Otherkin in your mind. Do some research first, with some of the websites I've used as resources in this book, and check their link lists. Many Otherkin forums also have areas specifically for newbies (or the confused, or confused newbies....). Check the threads there to see if your question is a commonly asked one. People really appreciate it if you sound like you've already done some research, and maybe answered a few basic questions yourself. On the other hand, if you're not sure where to start, there's nothing wrong with popping on and asking for resources if there aren't any listed.

There is always the chance that you'll get that ubiquitous jerk I keep alluding to who makes fun of you for whatever reason. Just ignore him. Arguing with such people is a waste of time for the most part. This is especially true if they make personal attacks. However, don't mistake someone giving you advice you may not want to hear for harassment. If you start a thread asking about the secret to physical shifting on your average therian forum, you're probably not going to get an enthusiastic response, but if people direct you to a resource to find out why physical shifting isn't possible, it's not flaming—it's advice. It may not be friendly, but it's worth listening to.

One other source of help I want to point out is therapy. Now, I will admit there's a lot of negative stereotypes about going through therapy, made even worse by the accusations that all Otherkin are insane. But being Otherkin and being in therapy does not prove those accusations true. As Su Fenton (whose interview you can read in Appendix B) says, a successful therapy session is as much about the therapist as it is about the patient. There are therapists who are Otherkin-friendly. Many of them, even though they may initially look askance at your beliefs, will simply factor being Otherkin into the rest of who you are. In addition, the social stigma surrounding therapy is decreasing. People are becoming more accepting, especially as more folks are being open about their experiences—people like most Otherkin, who have jobs or go to school, have social lives, and raise families. And there are Otherkin who learn enough about psychology to be able to educate professionals about us. Silver Flame and Zardoa both have Master's degrees in psychology (Educational and Depth/Jungian, respectively) and they have been quite open about being elven to the

various therapists and other psychologically trained people they've met along the way.

A therapist may or may not be able to help you with anything directly related to being Otherkin, especially as Otherkin is belief-based for most people, and a lot of therapists tend to stay strictly within the psychological rather than making judgements on your beliefs. However, therapy can be a huge help in dealing with other issues that may affect you as Otherkin. For example, back in 2005 I was concentrating on reprogramming some really unhealthy conditioning I'd had as a kid—experiences that seriously detracted from my confidence and tied into a couple of issues I had that, while they didn't really impair my everyday life, did make me rather unhappy. I had progressed to a certain point in detangling this particularly bad knot in my psyche, but was at a loss as to what to do with it next, as far as consciously changing my behavior and reactions.

So I called a therapist who happened to be rather heavy into Jungian psychology. I met with her six or seven times, once a week. I never told her about being therian, though I did explain some of the reprogramming I'd done, to include my deliberate personality aspecting experiment in 2004 (where I split myself temporarily into four personae). She thought that what I was doing was creative, and didn't see a thing wrong with it. Together we worked to find solutions to detangle more of that knot, and it worked beautifully. Never once did she accuse me of being insane, imbalanced, or that I needed to change anything other than issues that would help the problem I came to her with. Nor did she recommend that I see a psychiatrist about getting medicine to "help" me.

I believe a lot of this is because I went into her office openly seeking help, and with an open mind. I didn't tell her anything I didn't need to tell her; there was no need to confess my therianthropy to her. However, it's also because I found a therapist I could work with. The relationship between therapist and patient is just that—a relationship. Not all combinations work. It may take you a couple of tries to find a therapist who you feel comfortable with, but be patient—once you find the right one, it can be a huge help with improving your life in general.

Be Yourself

You are what is important. Not your memories, not what you may or may not be, not whether you are otherkin or human, magical or mundane. You. If you are otherkin, it means something, if you are not, it means something else, but it is all just labeling. The merits of a person are judged by their facets, not their interesting labels, and the label means nothing if it doesn't fit you. --Erelin

One of the most common sentiments voiced by survey respondents is that of self-honesty. The only people who are going to be impressed by a one-dimensional character are other one-dimensional characters. There's no harm in being who you are. You won't be able to make everyone like you whether you hide yourself or not, so you may as well be comfortable. The people who are worth your time are the ones who are going to accept you for who you are. Don't throw yourself away trying to make converts.

It's easy to get wrapped up in the Hunt For Who I Am. Unfortunately, this can be to the detriment of Art of Being Who I Am if too much time is spent on hunting and not living. Rialian observes this phenomenon:

Identity-kin are the ones that are Otherkin to have an identity, and they tend to need to have far more re-assurance, and need to build a lot around them for that identity to hold. Most of the folks I associate with most are not identity-kin...they use the term as a descriptor, not as the end-all explanation for their lives. As such, they do not build their lives around being Otherkin, they build their lives around what makes their life better, what drives them to make the world better for them.

In short, being Otherkin is neither the end of the world nor the beginning of it. It is a realization of certain previously uncategorized parts of yourself, and it is a process of exploring and coming to terms with those parts. It's not so much about changing yourself, since these things were always there in some capacity, as it is about understanding yourself and how you fit into the world. Being Otherkin, too, isn't the do-all and end-all of your self-identity. You may be Otherkin, but you may also be a parent, a child, a sibling, an employee, an employer, an organizer, a follower, or a mover and shaker. Keep your perspective flexible, and remember that you're special in your own way, so is everyone else we share this world with.

Finally, it is enough that you continue to live your life in the way you see fit. Being Otherkin shouldn't change that. It can enhance it, true, but you were special and unique and amazing even before you

Awakened. Remember that, and you'll find Awakening to be a lot easier and less complicated

Wow. I can't believe I finished the whole thing!

This was a much tougher book to write than *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone*. For that work, most of my research had already been done in the first decade of my magical practice, and filling in the blanks wasn't too difficult. I had the rough draft done in less than three weeks, and that was while working a full time job! Of course, I thought I was pretty damned good for having done that. I got a good case of neo-authoritis, that combination of egotism and self-promotion (with a healthy dose of genuine pride, I might add) that led me to believe I could write anything! So I set out to write a book on Otherkin.

And let me tell you—this thing has knocked me on my ass more than a couple of times!

The first time I realized just how little I knew was when I took a look at my outline and realized just how much work there was to do. I remember writing a message to a few friends in my Livejournal to the effect of "What am I getting myself into? Why am I doing this? There's so much I don't know! Why isn't (insert name of somebody who's been in the community longer than I have) writing this book? Why me?" And I was told, "Because *you're* the one who decided to write a book on Otherkin—and we know you can do it". So that helped me through that bad spot.

Then the surveys started rolling in. And kept coming. Some weeks I'd get none, but others I'd get a handful at a time. As I looked over all the information that I suddenly had in my possession—to include all the links and other resources people recommended—and all the books I had to read, I asked myself again, "Why am I *doing* this? I mean, I want to write the book, but what am I going to do with *all of this*?" But once I got started writing, things began to fall into place, and people kept showing me support.

There were some setbacks. A cross-country move and lack of regular internet access slowed my progress down the first few months of 2006. Then I got a job in a warehouse as a temporary measure just so Taylor and I could move into the house we rented. Unfortunately, between lifting boxes that were more than a third of my weight 8 hours a day one week, and data entry the next, coupled with my writing at home, gave me serious wrist and hand strain. I was worried that I was developing carpal tunnel; but once again my friends came through for me and gave me some stretches and other exercises to keep my

condition from worsening. Right when I needed a break, too, I took a week and a half off from work to get married, and that was the time I needed to recover. As soon as we got back in town I put my three week's notice in at my job, as Taylor offered to support me while I looked for something better.

It wasn't until the third draft, though, that I really began to feel comfortable with my work, that I was doing my quest justice. I wrote it during the month off I got before starting my job hunt (by far one of the best gifts Taylor has ever given me!). I spent most of it working on this book. I wanted to give a decent overview of the Otherkin subculture to both 'kin and non-'kin readers, and by this draft it was looking pretty close to final. In addition, during the creation of this draft I had a number of resources metaphorically fall into my lap. People would send me books, or point me to a link that was exactly what I needed. I found the summer 1986 issue of Circle Network News that had the article by the Silver Elves in it during this period (back issues were still available from Circle Sanctuary via their website), as well as a couple of other pertinent documents. And the edits Taylor had done on my previous draft had helped me to flesh out the manuscript a lot.

I had hit a certain point in my writing. Every time I started doubting my work and wondering if I should quit, I looked at what I'd already created and was amazed. Did I really write all that? *Fang and Fur* had been barely over 100 pages single-spaced Word, and yet here I was looking at an identically formatted manuscript that was pushing twice that! And as I looked over the content, refining it and adding details, I saw that I had not only written the book I wanted to write, but had actually done better than I expected.

Now, I realize that not all of you reading this are going to be as thrilled about my work as I am. You may disagree with a little, some, or all of it. In fact, you may even hate it (This happens to all books, regardless of author or genre.). Of course, I could be wrong, and you might very well be thrilled about it—or entirely neutral. I'm going to hope for the best, but if you really don't like what I've done, you know what you can do?

Write your own book.

No, seriously. I mean it. I believe that the more information there is available on a topic, the better. Even if not everyone agrees with it, it's still good that it's out there. People are diverse; we come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and that affects how we approach a given topic. I know that when I was writing this book, there were a couple of other people working on their own Otherkin books. That, honestly, pleased me to no end.

This might seem a little confusing—aren't those other books competition? Shouldn't I feel threatened by the idea that someone else

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may buy the other books and not mine? Wasn't it silly of me to fill out other authors' surveys for their research?

Not really. It all goes back to that love of information. The thing is, yeah, other people can (and no doubt will) write their own books on Otherkin. But you know what? They won't be this book. The other authors' interpretations are theirs, and this is mine. It's like my situation with *Fang and Fur*—when I wrote it, there were a couple dozen books on animal magic—and I'd read nearly all of them. But you know what? They weren't my book on animal magic. Even when other authors followed a common format, that of the totem animal dictionary, I still enjoyed reading them because each author had his own take on the meanings of totems and how to work with them. I enjoyed some more than others, but I read them all and kept most of them (Granted, I sometimes wish more people would break with the common format, but that's a rant for another time.). There's a lot of room left to work with; I've hardly covered every aspect of Otherkin in its entirety.

And if you keep looking for a book, and can't seem to find it, maybe it doesn't exist yet. Maybe it's your book. Maybe it's the write time to start sketching an outline, asking friends to look over writing samples, and take a few writing classes to you're your skills. Maybe, instead of continually looking for an idea, it's your turn to find that idea yourself and share it with the rest of the world.

That's one of my goals as a writer. I don't want to write another Wicca 101 book or another North American totem animal dictionary. And that's also why I've enjoyed working with Immanion Press, because they encourage new and unique approaches to material instead of trying to make a quick buck on something that's already been done a thousand times.

The djinn is out of the bottle, so to speak. More people are becoming aware of Otherkin, and more people will be looking for information. I believe that the best information comes straight from the source. We've already seen some of the misconceptions that have arisen; offering up more accurate material helps to counteract that. Even if you don't write an entire book, there are plenty of Otherkin-related websites, like <http://www.otherkin.net> and <http://www.otherkin-alliance.org> that are always looking for good, thoughtful essays. You can even, if you're so inclined, create your own website.

And if you, after reading this, have any reason that leads to you writing your own book, whether it's on Otherkin or any other topic, feel free to let me know. I'm a big fan of infecting others with the writing bug, and sometimes it just takes some encouragement and being pointed towards resources. If you're specifically delving into the realm of paganism, magic and related topics, you can check out the Pagan and Occult Author Resource Page, <http://www.thegreenwolf.com/poarp.html>, that

Lupa

Taylor and I maintain or join the Paleonova listserve at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PaleoNova>. Another really good resource is <http://newagewriting.info/index.html>, which has a lot of the ins and outs of getting published. And, regardless of what you're writing, feel free to shoot me an email at chaohippie@excite.com. I probably won't be able to read your manuscript, and I know more about nonfiction (specifically pagan/magical occult) than fiction, but I do love talking shop anyway, and I'll help you any way I can—even if it involves pointing you towards someone who will be more helpful in areas where I'm clueless.

Love,

Lupa

Appendix A: Otherkin Gathers Small and Large

Many of these occur on a local level; for a while I was the coordinator for the small, sporadic, but always entertaining Pittsburgh monthly meetings. Most major cities, at least in the United States, also have at least occasional meetings of 'kin—check your local meetup.com listings. Canada is also not to be left out, particularly Black Trillium which organizes 'kin-friendly events in Toronto on a regular basis.³⁵⁹

Speaking of Canada, Ontario is home to KinVention North. As of this writing, the last one was held in 2005; the website for the event is <http://kinvention.otherkin.net/>, and I'd imagine it'd be the place to check back for future KVN's.

Since 1998 Four Quarters Farm in Pennsylvania has hosted both *Walking the Thresholds* every June, and *Crossing the Thresholds* was added in October 2005.³⁶⁰ I can say from experience both are wonderful opportunities to learn about and interact with Otherkin, all out in the middle of the woods. Pennsylvania also has the Spoutwood Farm Faerie Festival (every first weekend of May since 1992), though reportedly it's not so much 'kin-oriented as a group of non-kin offering a place where 'kin can moonlight.³⁶¹

Lothlorien in Indiana hosts a number of kin-friendly events throughout the year, including Elf Fest which has been held since 1983.³⁶² Dancing the Endless Dream in Teaxs is another gather that has weathered a few years, celebrating its eighth round in 2006.³⁶³ Further down south in Florida one can attend KinSouth, which has been going on every year since 2002.³⁶⁴ Westkin occurs every year or so in California.³⁶⁵

In 2004, Raki organized AusGather, one of the few events in the Southern Hemisphere. While she said in her survey that it "taken over by the furies", there was apparently a glamourbombing run during the event.

Most Howls seem to either have been one-shot deals, or otherwise defunct. There was only one BritHowl in 2002³⁶⁶, and the

³⁵⁹ See <http://www.blacktrillium.com>

³⁶⁰ See <http://www.rialian.com>

³⁶¹ See <http://www.fairiefestival.net/>

³⁶² See <http://www.elflore.org>

³⁶³ See <http://www.clenari.net/Dancing/dancing.html>

³⁶⁴ See <http://www.anotherotherkin.com/Kinsouth/index.htm>

³⁶⁵ See <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/westkin/>

³⁶⁶ See <http://wolfdan.critter.net/howlsandcons/eurohowls/bh02-lw-a.htm>

EuroHowl only happened in 1996, 1997 and 1999.³⁶⁷ There was a Howl in 1997 in Oregon³⁶⁸. Currently, one of the most active howls is SEHowl in Alabama, which has been going strong since 1998.³⁶⁹ SEHowl actually occurs several times a year, with the two largest events in summer and fall, as well as smaller ones throughout the year. Information about it periodically shows up at <http://www.werelist.com>.³⁷⁰ Howlapalooza and Spirit Howl in Utah are maintained by the same people; the former is a private event that began in 2001.³⁷¹

Just as a note, keep in mind that if you're reading this several years after I wrote it, some of the information may be out of date. In addition, I left out information on gathers that haven't been repeated for several years. Check <http://www.otherkin.net/community/gathers/index.html> for updates on some gathers. Many Otherkin listserves and forums will also have announcements for upcoming events. As I said before, there are too many Houses and other groups for me to list in this book, but check local resources for any organizations in your area that may have public events.

³⁶⁷ See <http://www.swampfox.demon.co.uk/utlah/EuroHowls/>

³⁶⁸ See <http://www.peak.org/~ridgwood/AHWW/ORhowl97.html>

³⁶⁹ Guardian, personal communication, September 22, 2006

³⁷⁰ VanZandt, Wolf, personal communication, 19 September, 2006

³⁷¹ See <http://furry.milky.com/wiki/Howlapalooza>

Appendix B: Interview with the vampire Werewolf

Part of the reason that Otherkin often go through periods of doubt is because most of what we tend to believe about ourselves is perceived by a lot of non-'kin as insane. We worry that maybe we are insane, especially since our beliefs are mostly self-verified. It's also all too common in our society today to accuse anyone with uncommon beliefs that aren't recognized by mainstream religions as being in some state of insanity, whether it's a little bit of overactive imagination leading to delusion, or outright schizophrenia. "You believe what? That's crazy!" No wonder so many Otherkin are afraid to be public!

However, the people making these accusations about us generally aren't professionals. They're usually online bullies who just want to get a rise out of us. But as anyone who was picked on as a kid knows, that sort of behavior can still cause its target to be just a little less confident afterwards. So I set out to talk to an actual practicing therapist about the idea of Otherkin. I wanted to get a professional opinion about the concept of Otherkin, to include addressing the possibility that we may very well be crazy.

I was fortunate enough to be able to talk to Su Fenton, MSW LICSW³⁷², in Seattle, WA, on August 29, 2006. Over lunch at a little café near her practice, I explained to her the basics of Otherkin, as well as some details about my own experiences with the community and as a therianthrope. I'm not sure either one of us quite knew what we were getting into—I think we were both curious, but a little cautious, with the initial meeting. I've seen a therapist on a couple of occasions in my adult life, but never said anything about being a therianthrope. For her part, Ms. Fenton had had no previous experience with Otherkin, which I thought was actually a bonus. It meant that she wouldn't have any bias one way or the other about the concepts and ideas I would be explaining to her in our interview.

Most of our focus was on the psychology behind believing one is Otherkin, rather than the validity of the beliefs themselves. Ms. Fenton emphasized the difference between the psychological and the spiritual aspects of a belief, the latter of which we would be leaving alone for the

³⁷² In a subsequent email from Ms. Fenton on September 1, 2006, these abbreviations were explained to me as "meaning master's of social work which is clinical degree to do therapy and counseling and that I'm licensed to do independent clinical social work which is psychotherapy".

day. That wasn't an issue for me; I've spent years exploring my own psychology, though I'm no professional by far.

Ms. Fenton also emphasized that every therapist is different. There are numerous schools of thought in psychology and ways of working with patients. This means that even if you've had bad experiences with therapy in the past, it doesn't mean that you'll never find a therapist who works well with you. It may take you some time and some dead ends, but don't give up just because the first few you go to didn't work out.

I'm not going to just put down the transcript of our conversation here, partly because a couple of parts are a little obscured due to background noise. The other reason is because there's some background information that you will need for context that we didn't really get into in the taped portion of our conversation; either we talked about it beforehand, or I didn't mention it at all.

So, Tell Me About Your Childhood....

I started by explaining the basics of Otherkin to her—what we believe, why we believe it, and how it manifests in our daily lives. She asked me some really good questions, and the conversation touched on a number of topics, from neurobiology to conscious self-programming to the differences between multiplicity and DID/MPD.

Once Ms. Fenton had a decent understanding of the topic at hand, I agreed to use myself as a sort of guinea pig (guinea wolf?) I began explaining my own background as therian in detail, starting with my earliest memory of the totem Wolf and the resultant imprinting in my experience.

Her first request was for me to clarify what I meant when I said that I liked being able to explain those behaviors of mine "that resemble the behavior of a wolf". The example I brought up was how when I was young I would interact with other people based upon whether I saw them as Alpha or Beta to me—in short, frequent, exaggerated versions of the subtle power displays that sometimes characterize human behavior. How I saw a person affected how I reacted to them—if I liked them, I would submit, but if I didn't I'd attempt what I interpreted as a display of dominance (which often translated into bullying). The highly visible pack structure of wolves made more sense to me at the time, even though what I was doing was well within the realms of human behavior.

The first observation Ms. Fenton made was that she thought there might be someone in my life who was very strong, and another person who was very weak. That was an easy thing to address. My father is a very assertive person, definitely no pushover. He and my sister, who

is not quite a decade older than I am and is no weakling herself, sometimes butted heads. Most of my clear memories of her early on were when she was a teenager, and like most teenagers, she could be very headstrong. So I do remember a couple of arguments she and our dad got into, with my mother being a good mediator between them—patient, and strong in that patience. Dad usually won, as my sister still respected his authority, though she sometimes grated against it. But to me, it was obvious evidence of the pack structure, and that's as bad as it got. While my sister was not in actuality a weak person, to my young perception at the time it appeared that she was the loser and my father the victor—again, that heightened perception of rank. I had a very comfortable, safe childhood, pretty much the antithesis of abuse—but as young as I was, the way our family worked together helped to reinforce my lupine identity.

In response to this, Ms. Fenton began to consider how she would work with me as a patient. "I think eclectively," she said. "What would be the area of psychology for me to use to think about something?" She also emphasized that if I asked twenty different therapists for their opinion, I'd get twenty different answers. She specifically brought up "object relations theory; we talk about how we internalize relational pairs...you have a possibly aggressive father in the face of conflict, and a possibly weak, acquiescent sister" (Again, keep in mind that in my perception it was a matter of strength and weakness, but not necessarily in reality.). In my desire to be strong and therefore win any fights I might get into later in life (including with my perceived pack Alpha) I associated with the wolf, an animal that I saw as strong. This makes sense, especially since some of the earliest stories about wolves I read were Jack London's *White Fang* and *The Call of the Wild*, both of which emphasize the pack hierarchy and the need to be a tough wolf to survive.

Another idea that she brought up was "the process of individuation". I am very different from my family; they're fairly conservative, Republican, Roman Catholics, while I'm a progressive, Green/Libertarian/depends on the issue neopagan (They love me dearly and have just pretty much gotten used to the idea that I'm an oddball.). It's possible that one way of differentiating myself was through the identity of "wolf".

Moving on from family, we moved on to the topic of friends. I got picked on a lot when I was a kid—I was a little weird, I preferred playing out in the woods to playing with dolls or oohing and ahhhhing over movie stars. Most of the friends I had growing up were alternately friendly and mean, depending on how they felt. I did have a couple of good kids in my life, but it wasn't until college that I really learned that friends are people who aren't deliberately mean to you, and that they're

trustworthy. In addition, I really latched onto whoever I happened to be dating at the time, because I knew that that person would be nice to me, even if nobody else was. So that led to me developing a social structure that revolved around me and my significant other, followed by a few very close friends, and then the rest of the people in my life of varying types and degrees of attachment. This mirrored my conception of a wolf pack, with the Alpha pair, and then the rest of the closely-bonded pack, and then all other wolves and other animals in the area.

Another tangent that Ms. Fenton picked up on was how my wolfish identity was woven in with my love of the outdoors, something that I've also had most of my life. We talked about my perception that humanity is removed from Nature. That made sense, because my love of the woods was one of the reasons I got picked on so much. She remarked that "It [the wolf identity] makes it more acceptable to be a kid running around in the woods....like you were following your nature". As adults, we have less room for play and whimsy, and keeping the wolf side allows me to retain that piece of my childhood.

We got onto the topic of memories next, and how a person's memories can change, particularly when they're attached to a particular emotion. She described a hypothetical situation where, when someone dies, everyone involved has their own piece of the story. Because there is such an emotional involvement, the deceased person's loved ones and other people involved would try to seek out every detail; the result is that with each retelling of the story it would become more embellished. Apparently, this can actually permanently change the memory in a person's mind, so that, later on, what they believe happened may not necessarily be quite what they experienced. She said, "Having an emotion with a story, actually changes our memories. It's not that we're lying, it's that is actually changes our memories, we remember it a different way. Our emotions are really hooked up with it."

I proceeded to tell her about the concept of retroactive magic, which is a ritual designed to revisit a particular (usually negative) experience in our memories, relive it in our minds, but have it happen in the way we would have preferred that it had gone. While the magician realizes that the new "memory" is not what happened in this reality, s/he is able, after the reprogramming, to access the possibilities that the negative experience may have closed off to hir. S/he is, in a way, changing hir own reality now by accessing a different reality that parallels the past. In psychological terms, this means that the magician, by consciously dealing with the problem, now begins living hir life as if it had never occurred, and things had gone ideally.

I then picked up on my own "memories", explaining that they may have been self-constructed as a way to try to understand what it is to be a wolf, or something that I drew upon from the Collective

Unconscious of Jungian psychology. We had briefly touched on lucid dreaming, in which a person can consciously change his dream in order to make it end more favorably a little earlier, and now Ms. Fenton brought the conversation into dream interpretation. Neither one of us believed in universal dream symbols, but that it was possible for us to have some of the same archetypes in our mind. However, how the individual symbols manifest differ for each person. I brought up the example of two people dreaming about a dog. Now, I like dogs, and a dog in my dream is a good thing. Someone who has a phobia of dogs, though, may see the dog as part of a nightmare.

Now, the issue of memories may not seem relevant to our conversation at this point. We really didn't go much into how my "memories", whether they were literal or not, affected my therianthropy. I included these points, however, because I think they are very relevant to Otherkin, particularly as past-life memories are a common concern among many of us. Ms. Fenton had opened that part of the conversation by mentioning a person she knew in the local psychology community who had done some work picking apart the alleged "memories" of victims of childhood Satanic abuse. While these people were often seen in the 1980s media as undeniable proof of devil-worshipping cults, later exploration into the phenomenon began to reveal that many of their memories were actually implanted by other people for various reasons. This presented the possibility that memories could be manipulated, and easily at that.

I am not saying that everyone who has past life memories is automatically wrong, or making it all up. But the apparent malleability of memories, particularly those attached to strong emotions, is reason to look at your own memories more closely, if you base being Otherkin on reincarnation. A lot (though certainly not all) of the memories I have read or heard about from people with past lives, whether Otherkin or not, are quite emotional, crucial times in their lives that imprinted heavily on their memories. But if we consider the ideas that have been discussed in this interview, along with the fact that memories just deteriorate after time (do you remember what color your cake on your third birthday was?), it may be even more important to carefully consider whether your past life memories are exact, and how much emphasis you really give to them.

That being said, if you don't know much about your past, or if you believe your memories are suspect, *that doesn't mean you aren't Otherkin*. It also doesn't mean you didn't necessarily have a past life, either. I'm simply trying to emphasize that it's a good idea to keep a shaker of salt around, and also remind you that remembering things is well and good—but don't forget to pay attention to who you are now, as a faerie or a gryphon or a cat therian.

Heading back into our conversation, we started talking about the functions of the physical brain itself. I introduced my idea that perhaps my wolf-self was a way for me to understand the more primitive parts of my brain, the first and second circuits of Leary. I brought up my observation that most humans, at least in the United States, aren't raised to really deal with anger, fear, or other more primal emotions. We're taught to "be good" and "be civil" and "be strong", so we don't really have that good a grasp of them. I theorized that one way I made up for this was by using the imagery of a wolf, which eventually spread through my entire psyche.

Ms. Fenton replied to this by talking about the theory that the human brain evolved a piece at a time, with the most primitive part of the brain—that which we share with the more advanced types of animals—is called the reptilian brain. Other parts of the brain were more or less "built on to" that part as we evolved. She also brought in the differences between the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain, and how each side interprets the world in different ways. She talked about how dreams are the way that the right side of the brain uses symbolism to communicate with the left side of the brain, which is more rational and linear.

This tied all the dreamwork we'd talked about earlier back into therianthropy. I tend to be a very right-brained individual; I'm even left handed. Therefore I'm very used to thinking in symbols and nonlinear ways, and I am a very active dreamer. So it's not surprising that I can easily perceive myself, and pieces of my brain, in symbols. It's why I can see things both literally and metaphorically.

Speaking of the literal, Ms. Fenton questioned as to why I saw my wolf as a literal thing. I gave her the example of a blood sugar crash. I'm hypoglycemic, and when that happens, while as a human I think "Okay, I'm going to the store", as a wolf I am a single focus towards "Food. NOW." I know that, again, this is a normal human drive, and that it's caused by low blood sugar, but that I also explain it symbolically as wolf—so, more metaphorical than I thought. In addition, I consciously accent those parts of my life that resemble the behaviors and patterns of wolves.

She concluded the interview with what's as good a clean bill of mental health as any, in my opinion: "If you were to come to me for therapy, and to talk about this...I wouldn't be labeling you with a big diagnosis because of your ability to think about it with complexity, to enjoy it, to sometimes get into it, to look at it with distance...I might challenge some of, maybe, how you perceive it, but you're already open to the challenge...You've thought about half of it already yourself, and anything else you're probably going to chew on anyway yourself...but

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whatever works as a metaphor for you and it's meaningful, and it's organizing".

She brought up that she would probably also work more with the issues we had dealt with above, as well as the idea of my childhood rebellion against traditional gender roles, and how identifying with a powerful animal affected that. However, she wouldn't really attach anything pathological to my case (Needless to say, this was rather a relief for me. Not that I expected to be told I was certifiably insane, but any good feedback is appreciated.).

In Conclusion

A point that I did bring up was the fear that some Otherkin have of being committed against their will for being Otherkin. I was assured that this is a rather rare occurrence. First, the patient must either be proven to be a danger to himself or others, or to be unable to care for himself. In addition, each state has its own standards for determining these criteria, and they tend to be pretty stringent.

Also, Ms. Fenton seemed to be very impressed with the amount of thought I had put into my therianthropy. This is a definite point in favor of questioning yourself and leaving your options open. There's a reason that much of the Otherkin community emphasizes the health in doubting your beliefs and not taking everything as literal truth without thorough examination. And this is why—it allows you to keep a good perspective, and also maintain control of yourself.

One other thing that I'd like to point out from my own experience, and I know I said this before, but I want to emphasize it again: Going in with an open mind and a willingness to cooperate will mean a higher chance of success than if you've already set yourself up for failure. For example, if you already assume that the therapist will think you need to get medications from a psychiatrist for "curing" your delusional notions of being Otherkin, you may be more likely to get defensive if the therapist, say, questions why you believe what you believe. It has been my experience, though, that therapy can be used to work through all sorts of issues, including those not related to Otherkin, but that which can be used to improve your understanding of yourself as Otherkin. However, you have to give the therapist a chance to get an idea of who you are as a person, not just as an elf, or a therian, or a vampire, or whatever. Every part of our psyche affects every other part to some degree or another. It's like assembling something—if you don't have access to all the parts necessary, you can't figure out what you have or how it goes together.

I'd also like to note that a psychological viewpoint does not necessarily negate other aspects of being Otherkin. It is simply one layer

in who we are. You'll notice that in the interview above, a lot of the behaviors that I characterize as lupine are also found in humans, and it seems that there are some definite events in my past that contributed to my therian identity. However, this only addresses the psychological level, not the spiritual level of things. I see being Otherkin as a multilayered identity, and just because it can be "explained" through one method does not make it less valid on that level—or any other. In fact, having a better idea of why I am the way I am helps me to deal with any issues I may have, and I don't believe that this interview has disproven me in any way. If anything, it gives me, personally, more confidence in myself, because I realize that there are reasons for how I identify—but that I don't necessarily have to give up the entire Otherkin belief because of it. Psychologically, yes, this makes sense—but so does the spiritual aspect of totemism, the resonance of energy, and the possibility of past/alternate lives, either my own, or those borrowed from the Collective Unconscious. All are equally valid, and the more I know, the healthier it is for me.

Appendix C: The Ubiquitous Survey

Any time I've seen someone doing research for a book on Otherkin, there's always been a survey. Once I started work on *Field Guide*, I figured out pretty quickly why that is! While there are a few books on various types of 'kin as of this writing, there's nowhere near enough printed source material to write a book. In addition, I intentionally limited my internet sources. Part of this is because while the internet is an excellent way to find information, that information can sometimes be quite questionable. The bigger reason, though, is privacy. I opted not to use any information from listserves, forums, message boards, personal blogs or other communicative media, except in rare instances where I found something interesting—in which case I would ask permission to use it. I also did use my own Livejournal to ask specific questions of the Otherkin on my friends list, but it was with the disclaimer that it was for the book, and again, I asked permission before quoting or citing any material.

I did, however, use websites that are specifically designed to inform the general public who may happen upon them. This may seem a little confusing—what's the difference? Well, as far as I'm concerned, listserves and other communicative media are much more casual forums; akin to people sitting in a coffee shop or someone's living room chit-chatting. Websites, on the other hand, can be compared to workshops and lectures, more formal but still open to the public. The information conveyed in the former is meant primarily for the readers, though public forums may be "eavesdropped" upon by anyone who happens by. In addition, many Otherkin see these forums as safe space where they may explore being 'kin. If I was newly Awakened (or not) I would be unhappy to see something I'd said in confidence printed in a book. In addition, it's bad netiquette to join a forum/etc. just to troll for information from what's said.

I'll freely admit that I did post a link to my survey on a number of forums and other such things, often as a part of my introduction, but other than an occasional update on progress or a reminder about the survey deadline, that's all I'd say about it—and that's as far as my information-hunting would go there. A lot of them I stayed on just for entertainment/social purposes—the internet is my version of television; it's a good stress-reliever, but it's a lot more interesting and interactive!

So a lot of my information on Otherkin themselves comes from survey responses. This is the survey I used for research for this

book. I first posted it to my Livejournal at <http://lupabitchlivejournal.com/492539.html> on September 13, 2005. I crossposted it to Otherkin-related communities, listserves, and groups I was associated with, as well as linking it to my website. Some people posted their answers as replies to the journal entry above; others emailed me directly. I did manage to get a few hardcopy surveys out in the Pittsburgh, PA area before I moved, but only one of them came back to me. I collected surveys until October 1, 2006, just a little over a year after I started.

And now, on to the survey! Just for the fun of it, and to let you get to know me a little better, I've filled out the answers for myself. If you like, feel free to fill it in yourself and send it to me—I may very well expand later editions of this book!

If you'd like to submit your information for the second edition, please fill out the information and submit it to whishthound@gmail.com. Feel free to elaborate as you feel necessary, particularly given your thoughts on the information already in this edition of the book. All quotes will be properly cited in the text.

All questions are optional, but obviously the more you can tell me the more complete it'll make the next edition. Stay within your own comfort range, and feel free to use an alias if you prefer.

1. What name would you prefer to be cited as? How old are you in this life? Where are you located (this can just be a general vicinity, such as your state)? What is your physical sex? What gender do you identify as? Do you keep track of these things for any other life/existence/aspect?

Lupa, 28 years old, Seattle, WA. Physically female, but I identify as genderfluid androgynous—some days I feel female, some days I feel male, but most days I'm somewhere in the middle.

2. What type(s) of Otherkin do you identify as? (ie, dragon, elf, faerie, vampire, therianthrope, etc.) What are the physical/etc characteristics unique to your race/species, and to you as an individual? Does your present body reflect any of these traits? Do you ever experience phantom limbs correlating to your Otherkin self(s)?

I am a wolf therian (whee, how original!) Just a plain, *Canis lupus* type of wolf, not sure of subspecies. My body is rather lupine—lean, long limbed, but not too lanky (how many I's can we fit in this sentence, Lupa?) However, I see this more as a pleasant coincidence than anything having to do with my being a therian. I do have almost constant

phantom limbs of some sort, usually ears, less common muzzle and paws and tail, and occasionally full body.

3. What do you consider to be the origin of your Otherkin side(s)? (ie, past life/reincarnation, personification of a personality aspect, etc.) In other words, where did your Otherkin self/selves come from?

I don't really think it's reincarnation. I figure it's any/all of a number of things. Part of me says totemism, because my primary totem is Wolf. However, totems are external entities, where as I am the one who is a wolf. However, I think it's possible that Wolf the totem had something to do with it. Am I a wolf because Wolf chose me, or did Wolf choose me because I am a wolf? Chicken and egg, folks. I do think that totemism also helps with the possibility of energy resonance, that Wolf "reprogrammed" my energy signature to more reflect his own. Or I could just be drawing from the Collective Unconscious, with Wolf being a favored archetype.

I also think that it could very well be psychological. It's quite possible that I personify my more primal instincts—Leary's first and second circuits—as a wolf. Or it could be a result of self-conditioning due to early imprints of wolf as a favorite animal. And there's always the possibility that I'm insane, but I am quite functional in human society.

I do like the personal mythology aspect of it. Being a wolf works into my personal aesthetic quite well. I practice a lot of animal magic, I love having pets around, a lot of my artwork is made from old taxidermy mounts, fur coats, and other animal parts, and therianthropy ties in nicely with these for me, personally. I don't really favor one over the other right now. I think they all have their possibilities.

3a. If you replied past life/reincarnation, do you remember anything about your incarnation as that being? What was your culture like? What were you like? How well do you remember it? How consistent are these memories? How have you determined that they're not just products of your subconscious? (I'm not trying to discourage anyone here, but I am curious to know how different 'kin figure out what's memory and what's purely internal imagination.) Have you had any shared memories with someone else?

I do have "memories", of a sort, but I don't usually take them literally. I "remember" being a white wolf trotting down a mountainside and into a big green field full of wildflowers in high summer—it looks lot like Alaska during the brief summer they get, and Arctic wolves are white.

However, I don't really "read" them as literal memories. They seem more like either sensory "memories" given to me by Wolf, or me trying to understand more fully what it is to be a wolf. I suppose they always could be memories in truth, but if they are, it's a life gone and past—or perhaps one to come. What I'm concerned with is the here and now—I'm right here, right now, and I only get this moment once, so I'm going to enjoy it!

4. What was your Awakening like? When did you begin to realize you were Otherkin? What brought you to the conclusions you have today? How has your perspective changed since you first started suspecting there was something "different" about you? Did you ever doubt yourself, or even completely deny the possibility?

I Awakened pretty early. I remember being about two or three; my family had this big black German shepherd dog named Jake, and I'd look at him out on the back porch. Well, one day I looked out there, and Jake seemed a little different. I thought to myself, "Wow, Jake looks just like a wolf!" I think it was at that time that the totem Wolf first contacted me, using a wolf-like dog as his method of communication. Or so I like to think—I could be wrong. But as far as I can tell, Wolf agrees.

I spent my life from then on being obsessed with wolves, and being convinced I was a wolf. Any time any of my friends played a make-believe game, guess what I was? I was pretty easy to shop for, too, at my birthday and Christmas. I first read Jack London's *White Fang* and *The Call of the Wild* when I was 6, and must have read them literally over a hundred times over the next few years.

When I was 17, I started hanging out with some friends who were pretty heavily into White Wolf RPGs. They introduced me to neopaganism, and also to the idea that yes, Virginia, there is a werewolf—and it is you! Unfortunately, I took the White Wolf books to be thinly-veiled "truth", and it took a few months for me to discover the internet—and the Elvinkind Digest, which helped me sort myself out a lot, even though I mostly just lurked.

I've doubted myself a lot—but the belief-doubt-belief cycle is healthy, I've found. I question myself constantly and refine what I think about myself. I first filled this survey out about 6 months ago (it's now the week before Labor Day, 2006) and my answers have changed quite a bit! And, no doubt, when this book goes to print, I'll already disagree with something I've said here. But that's normal.

5. How does being Otherkin affect your everyday life? Do you feel comfortable in the body/environment you were born into?

Does it affect your choice of career, home or the people you prefer to socialize with? Do other people, or animals, ever sense something different about you, and how consistent are the reactions?

It doesn't so much affect my life as weave into it quite well. I'm quite happy in this body, other than occasional gender dysphoria when I'm having more of a "male day". But I'm happy in a human incarnation. I do prefer the woods, but that may just be because I grew up in a rural area and was a real tomboy as a kid.

I used to be a veterinary aide, but gave that up after seeing one too many tail-dockings on two-day-old puppies, and getting tired of people who paid good money to keep a dying animal alive—and suffering—for just another week in the hospital because they were too selfish to just let the poor pet escape his suffering. But that's the closest being therian has ever affected my real life, which is to say, not much. I tend to have a lot of friends who are Otherkin, but it's not really intentional—we just happen to run in the same circles.

I think energy-sensitive people may notice I'm a little different, but given that I introduce myself to people as Lupa, it's not too hard to figure out. Animals react well to me, but that's mainly because I've been working with them most of my life and I know how to work with body language and read their basic vocalizations.

6. How does being Otherkin affect your spiritual/religious life? Do you practice magic(k) at all, and if so, is being Otherkin a factor in that?

Again, therianthropy ties in quite nicely with my beliefs. I am a neopagan and an experimental magician, and I do work mostly animal magic. I have experimented with my therianthropy on a magical level, though not always intentionally—*Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone* has some more details on that in the shapeshifting chapter.

A side tangent, while I'm on the topic of shapeshifting. I've done mental shifts, astral shifts, phantom shifts, etc. However, the more I've accepted that I am wolf, the less frequently I've shifted. I mainly shift when I've been over on the human side of the scale too long—anything that's repressed works its way back to the surface. But the shifts are still pretty rare, and I maintain control over myself. It is a lot of fun, though, getting a heavy phantom shift along with a mental shift—closest thing to a physical shift I'll ever get.

6a. If you have practiced magic(k), have you ever participated in glamourbombing? What sorts of tools did you use?

I have glamourbombed before. I'm fond of leaving pretty feathers in odd places—windowsills, old keyholes, inside books.

7. Have you ever questioned your sanity? Has anyone else ever questioned your sanity? How do you deal with either/both situations? Have you ever received therapy, voluntary or involuntary, due to being Otherkin?

I question it quite a bit as a normal course of things—the unexamined life being not worth living and all. And it's good to keep myself from getting too delusional. Nobody's ever really questioned me—the couple of therapists I have talked to about it didn't seem too concerned.

8. How “uncloseted” are you about being Otherkin? Who knows, who doesn't and why? If you've told people, what was their reaction? Did it change over time?

Well, I suppose I'm pretty well open to anyone who reads this book, now, aren't I?

9. Do you know any other Otherkin, in person and/or online? What's your impression of the Otherkin community, both locally and more widespread? Have you been to any Otherkin gatherings?

Plenty, both in person and online. Here in Seattle there doesn't seem to be a huge community, though I've only been here a little while. Portland reportedly has a decent community. And how can I forget the awesome folks in Pittsburgh? As a whole, I think it's a wonderfully diverse group. Sure, there are nuts and flakes, but you find that anywhere. I'm fascinated by Otherkin, and I'd like to think at least a few Otherkin are fascinated by me.

I've been to both Walking the Thresholds and Crossing the Thresholds (both of which I highly recommend), and while I was in Pittsburgh I organized get togethers on a smaller scale.

10. What advice do you have to people who suspect they may be Otherkin—or, for that matter, may aid me in making this a better book? Do you recommend any particular resources—books, websites, etc.?

Pretty much everything I covered in Chapter 9. As Jarandhel has said, Awakening is a process, and there's no shame in taking your time.

I thought it would be of interest to disseminate some of the statistics from the original round of surveys, just to give folks an idea of what I had to work with. While the surveys weren't my only resource, they were important sources of first-hand information. Once again, a huge thank-you to everyone who took the time to complete the survey—this book wouldn't have been nearly as good without your help! I had a total of 130 surveys, plus my own, which I threw in for the fun of it for a grand total of 131. Also, just as a note, I did count multiple systems as single surveys (since the various people collaborated on the project rather than filling out individual surveys), deferring to the body and the sex and gender identifications for the body for biological statistics. I also had one survey which was compiled by four people, each in their own individual body; for the sake of number-crunching I finally decided to count this as four separate surveys. This is no offense intended to multiples; I recognize that people who share a body are still as much individuals as people who have their own bodies. This is simply the easiest way for me to come up with statistics, and I hope everyone will understand my decision. Now, on to the numbers!

--The age range tended towards late teens and early twenties. 11 were below 18 with the youngest being 13, 68 were 18 to 25, 23 were 26 to 32, 12 were 33 to 40, and 8 were 41 or older, with the oldest respondents both being 59. The remaining 9 did not specify age.

--Most of my respondents, 110 in number, were from the United States. 11 people came from Washington, 11 from Pennsylvania, 8 from California, 7 from Michigan, 7 from Texas, 6 from Illinois, 6 from New York, 6 from Ohio, and 5 from Florida. There were 4 from Georgia, and 3 each from Missouri, Oregon, Maryland, and the District of Columbia; Alabama, Colorado, Indiana, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin each had 2. Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, and South Dakota had 1 apiece. There were 3 other Americans with unspecified locations. Of those outside of the U.S., there were 5 from the United Kingdom, 4 each from Australia and Canada, 2 in Russia, and 1 each from Sweden, New Zealand, Asia (country unspecified) and Holland. 2 others gave no location at all.

--I had 80 female survey respondents, 48 male, and 3 unspecified; I counted transgendered people as whatever sex they identified/presented as. Of these, 87 were cisgendered, meaning that, like most people, they identified as whatever sex they were biologically. There were 5 transgendered people, including both male-to-female and some female-to-male. Curiously enough, there was a high proportion of people, 36 survey respondents, who identify as androgynous, genderfluid, or otherwise gender neutral, regardless of their physical bodies. This also included multiple systems including people or more than one sex. The remaining 3 did not specify any gender.

The types of Otherkin were tougher parcel out than I first expected. I wanted to avoid putting individual surveys into more than one category, so multiple systems and people who identify as more than one type of Otherkin have their own separate categories. **Don't let the numbers on some of these throw you—the multiples and more-than-one-flavor folk account for the lower counts on some groups.**

--Therians were the most common 'kin who answered surveys, numbering 35. Not surprisingly, the majority (14) identified as some species of wolf; timber or grey wolves were most common, but I did have one Ethiopian wolf therian. Next up were the 8 feline therians, including 3 jaguars, a leopard, a puma, and a trio of general felines. There were 3 foxes, 2 bears, 2 unidentified canines, a hawk, a raven, an anaconda, and a mouse. 2 other people claimed more than one animal, including a coyote/deer and a wolf/fox.

--The next numerous group were the dragons, all 18 of them. Then there were 14 elves, 9 fey of various types, 3 angels, 3 demons, 3 vampires, 2 Mediakin, 1 kitsune, 1 succubus, and I had one walk-in who identified as wholly human. There were also 2 Tuatha de Danaan and 1 sidhe. I had 5 others of various miscellany, including among others a self-described Wingborn, and a being resembling a sea serpent.

--There were 7 multiple systems, some of which were composed of all Otherkin, and others who were a mix of Otherkin and humans, as well as some unidentified souls. There was one system comprised of 2 elves, and another of twin kitsune. 3 of them had vampires, and among the various systems there were also a therian, an angel, and a tree, among others.

--I counted those who claimed to be more than one type of Otherkin separately from the rest. There were 26 total, with a wide variety of

identifications. There were 5 therian/dragon people, one of whom also identified as "imp", and another one which was also vampiric; of the therian sides there was a coyote, a wolf, a panther, a tiger and one who was both cat and wolf. There were also 3 vampire/therians, a vampire/dragon, and a vampire/fey. There were 3 elf/angels; 2 of them also identified as dragons, and additionally 1 of those also was a fox therian. I had two therians who also identified with gryphons, and one additionally claimed spyhnx as an extension of therianthropy. There was also someone who claimed both centaur and gryphon, a wolf therian/phoenix, a tiger therian/elf, and a kitsune/plantkin, among others. Two additional respondents claimed over a dozen aspects of varying types.

As far as origins went, I had a lot of people who believed in reincarnation. I included under that heading a few people who believed that their souls were not human, as well as those who believed the Other was a result of spiritual/memory residue from a past life. "Spiritual and/or magical" covers those who believe their being Other came from totemism or other bonds with nonhuman entities, as well as those who have consciously altered their energy and/or personalith through ritual. "Genetic" refers to those who believe that they either believe that there was something nonhuman in their family tree, or that nonhuman spirits commonly incarnate into their bloodline.

--Reincarnation accounted for 58 people, while 22 traced their origins to spirituality, magic or both. There were 7 walk-ins, and genetic and psychological explanations accounted for 4 people each. 21 people were unsure of their origins. Another 20 considered more than one explanation as possibilities, or in a couple of cases, different explanations for different aspects in one person or different headmates in a multiple system. The most common combination was reincarnation and walking in, with 5 people explaining different aspects/headmates that way. Reincarnation and genetics accounted for 2 others. Another pair combined reincarnation and personal mythology/metaphor, and one of these also added genetics into the mix. A sampling of other theory combinations included spirituality and psychology, reincarnation and psychology, and spirituality and walking in. And a few folks listed up to half a dozen different theories.

I didn't write this book to be quantitative so much as qualitative, so I'm offering these statistics primarily for the sake of interest and curiosity. Were I to embark on a project involving more number-crunching and comparisons, I'd want a much larger sampling of the community. Most of my respondents found the survey through Livejournal, though I did

disseminate it elsewhere, but it also adds that particular bias in. On the other hand, as I am still accepting surveys indefinitely, who knows? Perhaps I will get enough people to write another book on the statistical evidence. On the other hand, if someone else has the desire to do such a thing, I heartily support the project and will help in whatever way I can. If you feel like doing some comparing and contrasting, you can always check out the Otherkin.net directory, which lists Otherkin by geographic area, type, and other formats. It is located at <http://www.otherkin.net/community/directory/index.html>.

The surveys I got were more than sufficient to complete this particular book, and I really do appreciate everyone's help. I know it can take some bravery to share this sort of information to a stranger, and it also takes time. So, once again, thank you, muchas gracias, danke, merci, and all that good stuff!

Bibliography

Yes, this is a very long bibliography; I've annotated it as a way of highlighting some of the more important sources (important to me, anyway), as well as other points of interest, to help readers find further sources. My comments are in *italics*, below the resources they refer to. They're only my opinions, not the opinion of any of the survey respondents or other contributors, my editor, my publisher, or anyone else—just me, Lupa. Take them as you will. And if I don't comment on a book, it doesn't mean it's bad; I just chose to limit my comments to avoid this being a 100-page bibliography. I've also taken a couple of liberties with standard APA style, to include adding letter notations to separate out sources from the same author in the same year (ie, instead of listing the year as "2006", instead listing the first entry as "2006-A," the second as "2006-B", etc.). I have done with to help readers connect citations to sources more easily.

This is just a starting place for further resources. You may also want to check out the Otherkin and Therianthrope Book List that I mentioned at the beginning of this book; it was instrumental in helping me compile some of my research and as of this writing is still being updated regularly. I also have a magical/pagan/etc. book review blog at <http://lupabitch.wordpress.com> where I have more extensive reviews of some of the books. And if you're looking at this several years after the *Field Guide's* publication date, no doubt there'll be books that aren't here, books that are out of print and may be next to impossible to find (especially if they were self-published) and other significant changes.

Books and Magazines

Allen, Judy & Griffiths, Jeanne (1979). *The book of the dragon*. Secaucus, New Jersey: Chartwell Books.

Altman, Nathaniel (2000). *Sacred trees*. New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc.

Belanger, Michelle (2004). *The psychic vampire codex: a manual of magick and energy work*. Boston: Weiserbooks

This was the first book published specifically on psychic vampirism. While it deals with the energy work associated with psychic vampires, it also delves into some of the author's more personal material. An older version may be found at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/goth/vc/index.htm>.

- Bey, Hakim (1991). *T.A.Z.: the temporary autonomous zone, ontological anarchy, poetic terrorism*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia.
- Bourke, Angela (1999). *The burning of bridget cleary: a true story*. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc.

This is worth reading for the insight on faerie lore in Ireland around the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It's also the most complete study of Bridget Cleary's death I know of.

- Brown, Joseph Epes (1997). *Animals of the soul: sacred animals of the oglala sioux*. Rockport, MA: Element Books, Inc.
- Breslaw, Elaine (ed.) (2000). *Witches of the atlantic world: a historical reader & primary sourcebook*. New York: New York University Press.
- Bulfinch, Thomas (1981). *Bulfinch's mythology*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc.
- Campbell, Joseph (1984-A). *The masks of god: oriental mythology*. New York: Penguin Books.
- (1984-B). *The masks of god: primitive mythology*. New York: Penguin Books.

As you can probably tell, I am a huge fan of Joseph Campbell, particularly Primitive Mythology. I highly recommend him to anyone even remotely interested in mythology, as he weaves it in with Jungian psychology, anthropology and other disciplines.

- Clark, Jerome (1993). *Unexplained! 347 strange sightings, incredible occurrences, and puzzling physical phenomena*. Detroit: Visible Ink Press.
- Cohn, Norman (2000). The night-witch in popular imagination. *Witches of the atlantic world: a historical reader & primary sourcebook*. New York: New York University Press, p. 117-125.
- Cowan, Douglas E. and Lorne L. Dawson (ed) (2004). *Religion online*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Davidson, H.R. Ellis (1969). *Scandinavian mythology*. London: Paul Hamlyn.
- Dawson, Lorne L. (ed.) (2003). *Cults and new religious movements: a reader*. Ames, Iowa: Blackwell Publishing Professional.
- Douglas, Adam (1992). *The beast within: a history of the werewolf*. New York: Avon Books.
- Ellwood, Taylor (2004). *Pop culture magick*. Stafford, United Kingdom: Immanion Press.
- (2005). *Space/time magic*. Stafford, United Kingdom: Immanion Press.
- (2007). *Inner alchemy*. Stafford, United Kingdom: Megalithica Books.

I should probably mention that Taylor is my husband, just for disclosure's sake. Regardless of our relationship, though, I do consider him to be an excellent author on magical and occult topics, as do others. Mediakin in particular may enjoy Pop Culture Magick for its exploration of pop culture entities (such as anime characters) as independent beings. Space/Time Magic is noteworthy for taking magic outside of linear space/time and expanding possibilities. Inner Alchemy has a lot of good information on energy work and resonance, some of it relevant specifically to psychic vampires, and some of it to Otherkin and magic workers in general; the book as a whole is concerned with working magic with the body, even on the cellular level. All of his work is designed to redefine the boundaries of magical practice.

Flame, Silver, and Silverstar, Zardoa (The Silver Elves) (1986). Elven Group Dynamics and Bonding Ritual. *Circle Network News*, 8 #2, p. 13.

Fortune, Dion (1973). *Psychic self-defence*. New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc.

Frazer, Sir James (1993). *The golden bough*. Hertfordshire, United Kingdom: Wordsworth Editions Limited.

Graves, Robert (1992). *The greek myths*. New York: Penguin Books.

Greene, Rosalyn (2000). *The magic of shapeshifting*. Boston: Weiserbooks.

The first book dedicated to therianthropy, with information on just about every aspect of being a shapeshifter you can think of. The author writes primarily from the magical theory of origin and draws on a wide variety of esoteric topics. This is a controversial book, as some of the online therianthrope community argues that Greene plagiarized information from the internet. Additionally, some of the material varies very widely from what is often encountered in the therian community, particularly where the book uses spiritist techniques, and the author's views on bilocation and physical shifting. It's a good book overall, but balance it out with other sources, such as therianthropy.org and werelist.com.

Harpur, Patrick (2003). *Daimonic reality: a field guide to the otherworld*. Ravensale, WA: Pine Winds Press.

I consider this mandatory reading for Otherkin, magic workers, and anyone else interested in the nonphysical world. Harpur weaves cryptozoology, ghost studies, UFOs, faerie lore, and other areas of mysticism and the paranormal, with Jungian archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, all through an academic voice. It can be a little dry, but the material is fascinating.

Jackson, Nigel (1995). *The compleat vampyre: the vampyre shaman, werewolves, witchery, and the dark mythology of the undead*. Somerset, United Kingdom: Capall Bann Publishing.

- Jamal, Michele (1995). *Deerdancer: the shapeshifter archetype in story and in trance*. New York: Arkana.
- Johns, Chris (2006). Editor's note. *National geographic*, 209 #2, no page number.
- Kaldera, Raven (2005). *The ethical psychic vampire*. Philadelphia: Xlibris (self-published).

This is a wonderful book on psychic vampirism; it covers a lot of practical territory that hadn't been written about before in previous books (most of which dealt with sanguine vampires) that's definitely of interest to psychic vampires.

- Keightley, Thomas (1978). *The world guide to gnomes, fairies, elves and other little people*. New York: Avenel Books.
- Koltuv Ph. D., Barbara Black (1986). *The book of lilith*. Yorks Beach, Maine: Nicholas-Hays, Inc.
- Lehmann, Rev. Gail (2004). *Elenari healing system*. Self published ebook.
- Lopez, Barry Holstun (1978). *Of wolves and men*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

While not directly related to Otherkin, I highly recommend this to all animal lovers, simply because it is a thorough look not only at the human relationship to wolves, but to all of nature by extension.

- Lysaght, Patricia (1986). *The banshee: the irish death messenger*. Boulder, CO: Roberts Rinehart Publishers.

This is the most thorough overview of Irish banshee lore out there. It is academic in tone, so it can be a bit dry, but the research is phenomenal. I learned quite a bit from this book.

- Mack, Carol K. and Mack, Dinah (1998). *A field guide to demons, fairies, fallen angels, and other subversive spirits*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Marie de France (1986). *The lais of marie de france*. New York: Penguin Books.
- McNamee, Gregory and Art Wolfe (illustrator) (1995). *In the presence of wolves*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.
- Melton, J. Gordon. (1999). *The vampire book: the encyclopedia of the undead*. Canton, Michigan: Visible Ink Press.
- Mish, Frederick C. (ed), et. al. (1993). *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary: tenth edition*. Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Inc.
- Montgomery, Ruth (1979). *Strangers among us*. New York: Fawcett Crest Books.

Noctis, Natassja (2006). *The therian bible*. Morrisville, North Carolina: Lulu.com (self-published ebook).

Ovid, Mary Innes (trans.) (1967). *Metamorphoses*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc.

Parrinder, Geoffrey (2000). Activities of african witches. *Witches of the atlantic world: a historical reader & primary sourcebook*. New York: New York University Press, p. 145-152.

Pickands, Marcia L. (1997). *The psychic self-defense personal training manual*. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc.

Pijoan, Teresa (1992). *White wolf woman and other native american transformation myths*. Little Rock, AR: August House Publishers, Inc.

Pike, Sarah M. (2001). *Earthly bodies, magical selves: contemporary pagans and the search for community*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

I can't say enough good about this book. Again, it's not directly related to Otherkin, but it is an excellent overview of the neopagan subculture and one of the less patronizing academic studies. Otherkin who are pagans, of course, may be interested; however, there are enough parallels in the structure of neopaganism and the Otherkin community that nonpagan Otherkin may find some familiar ideas.

Powers, Pamela Leigh (2000). *Chinese power animals: archetypes of transformation*. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc.

Pratchett, Terry (1992). *Small gods*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

If you haven't been introduced to Pratchett, this is a great place to start.

Rockwell, David (1991). *Giving voice to bear: north american indian myths, rituals and images of the bear*. Niwot, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers.

Roth, Walter E. (2000). The medicine man and the kanaima. *Witches of the atlantic world: a historical reader & primary sourcebook*. New York: New York University Press, p. 213-220.

Silver Elves (2001). *The magical elven love letters, volume 1*. Sebastopol, CA: Silver Elves Publications.

The Silver Elves have been writing their letters since the late 1970s. This volume includes the earliest letters (several hundred pages of them, in fact) as well as a handful of the first internet letters. They carry a strong air of one of the threads of the bandful of the first internet letters. They carry a strong air of one of the threads of the early Otherkin community in them, the idea of birthing magic into this world, and are definitely worth a read no matter how you identify. The Silver Elves, as of this writing, also have published An Elfin Book of Spirits: Evoking the

Beneficent Powers of Faerie and The Book of Elven Runes, neither of which I have read, but both of which are on my to-read list.

Simmons, Marc (2000). Pueblo witchcraft. *Witches of the atlantic world: a historical reader & primary sourcebook*. New York: New York University Press.

Slater, Lauren (2006). True love. *National geographic*, 209 #2, p. 32-49.

Steiger, Brad (1999). *The werewolf book: the encyclopedia of shape-shifting beings*. Detroit: Visible Ink Press.

The Temple of the Vampire (1989?). *The vampire bible*. Self-published ebook.

Virtue, Doreen (2002). *Earth angels: a pocket guide for incarnated angels, elementals, starpeople, walk-ins, and wizards*. Carlsbad, California: Hay House, Inc.

This book is basically Otherkin for the New Agers. Not that this is bad; it's just a bit more lightweight than a lot of Otherkin information. The different categories of Earth angel correspond roughly to some types of Otherkin, but the method of determining what you are consists of one brief questionnaire. Still, it's a cute little book, and some Otherkin do resonate with the ideas in it.

Wangu, Madhu Bazaz (1991). *Hinduism*. New York: Facts on File.

Wetzel, Joshua (2006). *The paradigmatic pirate*. Stafford: Megalithica Books.

Whitcomb, Bill (2002). *The magician's companion: a practical guide to magical and religious symbolism*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications.

Wilson, Robert Anton (1983). *Prometheus rising*. Tempe, Arizona: New Falcon Publications.

This is another "mandatory reading for everyone" book. I have used this to help overcome a lot of bad habits and conditioning, and reprogram myself to my own preferences. It's a great book on understanding how you work and why you are the way you are, combining Leary's Eight Circuit Model of Consciousness, transactional analysis, and a whole lot more. Basically a user's guide to human conditioning, something we are all subjected to no matter what our identity (unless you happen to have been raised away from all humanity for the first 18 years of your life). It's not the only guide for conscious evolution, but it's a good starting place.

Winged Wolf (2006). *The care and feeding of vampires: an energy-worker's guide to real vampirism*. Morrisville, North Carolina: Lulu.com (self-published).

Winged Wolf has a lot of unique theories on what causes vampirism, as well as theoretical ways of curing it. I do wish she'd included a bibliography; I'd like to know

where she got her information on vampires from, or at least what works influenced her understanding of psi (but I'm a stickler for sources). Still, it's worth a read if you get a copy.

Yolen, Jane, editor (1986). *Favorite folktales from around the world*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Young, William A. (1995). *The world's religions: worldviews and contemporary issues*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Other Books

These are books that I know are out there, but I either didn't use them as source material or I didn't get a chance to read them before this was published.

Belanger, Michelle (2005). *Sacred hunger*. Dark Moon Press (Lulu.com).

Dhampir, Strigon (2003). *Vampire magic: Under the Moon* (CafePress.com).

Elorath (2006). *Sanguinomicon book 1: "coming forth by day"*. Rakasha Books (Lulu.com).

--(2006). *The strigoi vii grimoire*. The Sanguinarium (Lulu.com).

Hall, Jamie (2003). *half human, half animal: tales of werewolves and related creatures*. Self-published.

While not specifically about Otherkin, I had this nonfiction work on worldwide shapeshifter lore recommended to me a number of times as I was writing the Field Guide and thought it would be worth mentioning as an additional resource of interest.

Johnson, V.M. (1995). *Dhampir: child of the blood*. Fairfield, CT: Mystic Rose Books.

This should not be confused with the novels written by Barb and J.C. Hendee. I had a copy of this book for a while and while it was written in a style more reminiscent of *Vampire: the Masquerade* (in my opinion, at least), it was presented as a nonfiction account of modern-day vampirism.

Lupa (2007). *Shifting, shamanism and therianthropy: magical techniques for your therioside*. Self-published via Lulu.

Polson, Willow (2003). *The veil's edge: exploring the boundaries of magic*. New York: Citadel.

This is a book on pretty standard neopagan magic. The chapter on Otherkin is incredibly basic, stating mostly that we exist and that we feel different to her. If you're getting the book anyway, fine, but don't pick it up just for the Otherkin info.

Sanguinarius (2006). *What do you think vampires are like?* Sanguinarius (Lulu.com).

This is the compilation of results from the Sanguinarius.org survey from 1998-2000. The results are also available for public view on the website.

Van Houten, Sebastiaan (ed.) (2006). *The vampyre almanac 2006*. Lulu.com.

Virtue, Doreen (2007). *Realms of the earth angels: more information for incarnated angels, elementals, wizards, and other lightworkers*. Carlsbad, California: Hay House, Inc.

Wicker, Christine (2005). *Not in kansas anymore: a curious tale of how magic is transforming america*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

This book includes a chapter on Otherkin from the perspective of a non-Otherkin writer. It's pretty obvious this is her first real exposure to the community; she seems fixated on superficial details, and the book has a very "touristy" feel to it. The subtitle of the expanded paperback edition is Dark Arts, Sex Spells, Money Magic, and Other Things Your Neighbors Aren't Telling You, and while the content isn't quite that sensationalized, the lack of depth throughout the entire book left a lot wanting.

There are a number of self-published titles, particularly on vampirism, that I didn't mention. Most of them are on Lulu.com; just type in words like "vampire" in their search engine. As of this writing the fiction is still mixed in with the nonfiction (which includes a few magazines), so you'll have to do a little hunting around.

websites

As the Otherkin community has stemmed quite a bit from online interaction, there is a plethora of information available on the internet. Normally I wouldn't use quite so many websites as sources, but it's a necessity when dealing with this topic. Many of these were used mainly to back up one or two facts; however, most are excellent resources and several were cornucopiae of research material for me.

There are a couple of books that have since been placed online. I have used the publication date of the website, not the original book (after all, a website with a publication date from the early 20th century would be quite an anachronism!). Therefore, (unknown) denotes a

webpage whose publication/copyright date is unknown, even though the publication date of the book may be right on the page.

Aladar (unknown). *Rise of the elven vor'jen*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.italian.com/elvsala1.htm>.

Amanjaku and Linz, (1998). *Brinn/brrnn*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Corridor/1015/here/brim.html>.

As I mentioned earlier, I remember reading about the Brinn and Brrnn way back in the mid-1990s, and then nothing more. If anyone happens to have any more information on them, feel free to contact me. This is the most complete site I could find, and even then it's rather sparse.

Angelo, Christopher (unknown). *One celestial's view on the septagram*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.otherkin.net/harmonyDiscord/orc/other/angelosevenstar.html>.

<http://www.otherkin.net> is a really, really good resource. It includes essays, creative writing, a directory of Otherkin around the world, an Otherkin-based Wiki, and plenty more. I also really appreciate that two excerpts of this book ended up getting posted there for people to review (thank you, Malcolm!!!).

Anonymous (1997). *alt.horror.werewolves frequently asked questions*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from http://www.techwolf.net/ahww_fa.html.

Anonymous (2004-A). *Psi-feeding ethics*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.sanguinarius.org/guide/psi-energy/psi-feeding.shtml>.

Anonymous (2004-B). *Urban dictionary: otherkin*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=otherkin>.

Anonymous (2005). *Dissociative identity disorder*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.kinhost.org/wiki/Main/DissociativeIdentityDisorder>.

Anonymous (2006-A). *Angel*. Retrieved September 26, 2006 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angel>.

Anonymous (2006-B). *Clinical lycanthropy*. Retrieved September 22, 2006 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clinical_lycanthropy.

Anonymous (2006-C). *Demon*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demon>.

Anonymous (2006-D). *Elenari*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elenari>.

Anonymous (2006-E). *Griffin*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Griffin>.

Anonymous (2006-F). *Jonathon sharkey*. Retrieved December 30, 2006 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathon_Sharkey.

- Anonymous (2006-G). *Skin-walker*. Retrieved September 22, 2006 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skin-walker>.
- Anonymous (2006-H). *Howlapalooza*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://furry.wikia.com/wiki/Howlapalooza>.
- Anonymous (2006-I). *Otherkin*. Retrieved October 4, 2006 from <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=otherkin>.
- Anonymous (2006-J). *Renfield's syndrome*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renfield_syndrome.
- Anonymous (2006-K). *Walk-in*. Retrieved September 22, 2006 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walk-in>.
- Anonymous (unknown-A). *Hemosynth*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.sanguinari.us.org/articles/hemosynth.shtml>.
- Anonymous (unknown-B). *Untitled*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.otherkin.net/wiki/Manual/Totemic>.

The anonymous sources vary. Some are Wikipedia articles, which have multiple authors who generally do not use their government-recognized names. Others are essays I found where no author was given, or only an email address (which I didn't want to publish here, and which no one replied to when a request for an author name was sent). Normally I wouldn't use so many Wiki articles, even though I only grabbed a single fact from most of them. However, particularly in the case of Otherkin-related topics the best sources come from the community itself, members of whom commonly add their two cents to Wikis.

- Aquino V°, Lady Lilith, Magister William T. Butch IV°, Robertt W. Neilly, GME O.V. and Priestess S. Thompson, M. O.V.
(unknown). *Order of the vampyre*. Retrieved December 31, 2006 from <http://www.xeper.org/ovampyre/>.
- Astraea (unknown). *Suggested terminology*. Retrieved September 22, 2006 from <http://www.astraeasweb.net/plural/glossary.html> (cached).
- Belanger, Michelle (2004). *The otherkin author project*. Retrieved March 1, 2007 from <http://kheperu.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=199&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>.
- Benson, Melissa A. (1997). *Phoenix's flight*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.run.to/phoenix>.
- Blau, Ludwig, and Kohler, Kaufmann (2002). Retrieved September 26, 2006 from *Jewish encyclopedia.com: angelology*. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=1521&letter=A&search=angelology>
- Bode, Christopher (2006). *The rabbit hole glossary*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://www.elfstarstudios.com/words.html>.
- Bridges M. D., Kenneth R (2003). *Iron deficiency*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://sickle.bwh.harvard.edu/fe-def.html>.

- Bronsted, Niels (2000). *The deva evolution*. Retrieved 3 April, 2007 from <http://www.synthesis.tc/Articles/DevaEvolution.htm>.
- Buchanan M.A., PhD, Rev. D.C. (unknown). *The transactions of the asiatic society of japan/inari: its origin, development, and nature*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://kitsune.hellwood.org/inaribook.htm>.

This is an old book that includes some good kitsune information that has since been transferred to the internet. There are links to a couple others on the main website.

- Charles, R. H. (trans) (unknown). *The book of enoch*. Retrieved September 26, 2006 from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/boc/boc010.htm>.

Sacred-texts.com is a great resource, especially if you're on a bit of a budget. As of this writing the site does maintain itself partially through sales of CD-ROM versions of the site, though, so if you can afford it, pick one up—there are literally hundreds of books on it, including this 1917 translation.

- Davis, Kris (unknown). *The hunger: it's [sic] causes and dealing with it*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.sanguinarius.org/articles/hunger.shtml>.

- Devan (unknown). *What is an elvenstar?* Retrieved January 1, 2007 from <http://www.elvendrums.com/elvenstar.php>.

- Dietrich, D.E., Garlipp, P., Godeche-Koch, T., & Haltenhof, H. (2005). *Lycanthropy--psychopathological and psychodynamical aspects*. Retrieved September 22, 2006 from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=pubmed&dopt=Abstract&list_uids=14674954.

- Dracona, Jack (unknown). *Ex-vampire*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://www.lionsgrove.com/exvampire.html>.

- Dreamsinger, Jarandhel (2003). *When we walk strange ways together*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://wanderingpaths.hellwood.org/articles/jarinawakening.html>.

- (2005). *Kin to the other*. Retrieved September 22, 2006 from <http://wanderingpaths.hellwood.org/articles/kintotheother.html>.

If I were going to be authoritarian about things, I would order you to read Kin to the Other. However, since I'm nicer than that, I will merely strongly recommend it. It's not very long, but it is a really good look at the meaning of the word "Otherkin" and what it implies.

- Duo (2006). *Answering lupabitch's queries*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://kyoudai02.livejournal.com/203616.html>.

- (2006). *Vampiric questions posed by lupabitch!* Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://kyoudai02.livejournal.com/208246.html>.

Sometimes people enjoy sharing with others the answers to questions I ask. I consider it a compliment to my ability to ask good questions, as well as an honor in the form of time and effort that are put into the answers.

Ellwood, Taylor (2006). *Otherkin identity: is it more than just a label?* Retrieved December 31, 2006 from <http://www.otherkin.net/articles/identity.html>.

Normally Taylor lets me handle the Otherkin-related writing. However, he was inspired to write this while editing the Field Guide. It's a really thought-provoking essay on the nature of identity as it relates to Otherkin.

Enygma (2004). *Real vampires*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from http://www.sanguinarius.org/articles/enygma_real_vampires.shtml.

Evans-Wentz, W. Y. (unknown). *The celtic doctrine of re-birth and otherworld scientifically explained*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/ffcc/ffcc412.htm>.

Faolchú, Sarasvati (unknown). *V5 and k17 viral hypothesis*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://sarasvatisanguinarius.org/v5.html>.

Flesher, Paul V. M. (1997). *Buddhism glossary*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/religionet/er/buddhism/BGLOSSRY.HTM>

Future, Mike (unknown). *Finding substitutes*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://www.sanguinarius.org/articles/MF-finding-substitutes.shtml>.

Galan, Prinz (1998). *Untitled*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.sanguinarius.org/qresp-04.shtml>.

Goldman, Ken, Rosenman, John, & Spence, Matthew (unknown). *Kinships*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://anotherotherkin.tripod.com/angelicpress/Kinships/index.htm>.

I was given several back issues of Kinships by a friend of mine near the end of writing this book. The content is primarily comics, fiction and poetry by Otherkin, though there's occasionally a piece of nonfiction. It's all good stuff.

Graham, Nicholas (2006). *An apocalyptic interpretation of otherkin*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://fraterachdae.livejournal.com/237357.html>.

This essay, too, is an amazing piece of work. I've shown this essay to numerous Otherkin, and a lot of them resonate with what it says. Again, it's not too long, but well written. Also, those of you familiar with my other works may recognize Nick as

the person who wrote the guest essay in Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone. He has his own book out, *The Four Powers*, which is a superior introduction to magical practice from many different angles, not just Wiccan 101 or the rudiments of ceremonial magic—in fact, many of the exercises are based on Chaos magic. But I digress.

Hearn, Lafcadio (unknown). *Myths of unfamiliar japan*, volume 1. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://helwood.org/kitsune/hearn.htm>

House Eclipse (2003). *Comprehensive vampire community dictionary* [v]. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.house-eclipse.org/dictionary/v.shtml>.

Jakkal (2004-A). *Therianthropy.org*. Retrieved September 22, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org>.

Therianthropy.org/Shifters.org is one of the best resources on the topic of, well, therianthropes. The site itself is a highly recommended resource, and one I would consider mandatory reading for anyone with any interest in therianthropy. As of this writing (April 2007) the site is offline except for <http://forums.therianthropy.org>, but I've heard anecdotally that it'll be up again eventually.

- (2004-B). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/encyclopedia.htm>
- (2004-C). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/flavors-C.htm>.
- (2004-D). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/shifting-a.htm>.
- (2004-E). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved 24 September, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/shifting-b.htm>.
- (2004-F). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/shifting-c.htm>.
- (2004-G). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/shifting-m.htm>.
- (2004-H). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/shifting-p.htm>.
- (2004-I). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/shifting-r.htm>.
- (2004-J). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/shifting-s.htm>.
- (2004-K). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/terms-p.htm>.
- (2004-L). *Shifters.org*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/SO/terms-t.htm>.

Jung, Carl Gustav (unknown). *The concept of the collective unconscious*. Retrieved September 22, 2006 from <http://www.timestar.org/collective.htm>.

Kaldera, Raven (unknown). *Classic shamanism and core shamanism: basic differences*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from http://www.cauldronfarm.com/writing/shaman_compare.html.

K'Llayna, et. al. (2000). *An faq list of the elenari*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://elenari.net/Elenari/Elenarifaq4.html>.

Korra'ti, R'ykandar (2006). *The elfinkind digest*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://www.murkworks.net/~elflist/>.

I first joined the Digest back in 1996. I was on for a couple of years, then off for a couple of years, then rejoined a while back. I don't even remember what email address or alias I was using in my early years, but I have run into a couple people who were on there since before I was. Like any listserve it goes through its quiet times, but it's a good resource to join—good people. I got a good foundation from it. This site is its basic information page.

Korablev, Leonid L. (unknown). *The true elves of europe*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://www.shelltown.net/~dangweth/elfsaga.html>.

kya_rayn (2006). *From my eyes*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.otherkinalliance.org/frameset.html?/articles/phoenix.fmyeyes&closewindow>.

Otherkinalliance.org is another highly recommended general resource, including articles, a forum, a chat room, and other good stuff. It should be one of your first stops online if you're looking for information.

LaHaise, Kit (1997). *Feeding: tapping the land, and vampirism*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.comnet.ca/~foxtrot/kitsune/kitsune7.htm>.

La Shure, Charles (2001). *Kumiho*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/k/kumiho.html>.

Liesk (2006). *A comprehensive introduction to a psychological view of therianthropy*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://liesk.feralscribes.org/essay8.php>.

Another must-read, entire site included!

magpie (unknown). *an essay on the seven pointed star*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.otherkin.net/harmonyDiscord/orc/other/magpiesevenstar.html>.

- Markstein, Don (unknown). *Werewolf by night*. Retrieved September 23 from <http://www.toonopedia.com/werewolf.htm>.
- McDill, C.P. and Aria Nadii (2005). *Untitled*. Retrieved September 22, 2006 from <http://www.wildmuse.net/glamourbombs/faq005.html>.
- McDill, C.P. and Aria Nadii (2005). *Untitled*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from www.wildmuse.net/glamourbombs/faq007b.html.
- McGlashan, Tom, Miller PhD, Tandy, Woods MD, Scott, et. al. (unknown). *PRIME early screening test for schizophrenia and psychosis*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.schizophreniacom/sztest/>.
- Memoryanddream (2001). *Talk about turning: reality of "making" a vampire*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.drinkdeeplyanddream.com/realvampire/turningessay.html>.
- Moonbloode (2006). *Informed alternative to laceration*. Retrieved January 27, 2007 from http://www.house-eclipse.org/hex/hex_plugins/content/content.php?content.82
- Morales, Joseph (1997). *The hindu theory of world cycles*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://bahamacom/karma/yuga.htm>.
- Nelson, Greer (unknown). *What do otakukin believe*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://otakukin.atspace.com/belief.htm>.
- Nozaki, Kiyosho (unknown-A). *Background to appreciation*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from http://www.coyotes.org/kitsune/kitsune_book/chapter1.pdf.
- (unknown-B). *Concerning the konjaku monogatari*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from http://www.coyotes.org/kitsune/kitsune_book/chapter3.pdf.
- Orthaevelve (2006). *Sanguine feeding lecture*. Retrieved January 27, 2007 from http://www.house-eclipse.org/hex/hex_plugins/content/content.php?content.33.

For those interested, Orthaevelve has contracted a book on sanguine vampirism with Immanion Press; look for it in 2008.

- Osborne, Coyote (2005). *A little about coyote*. Retrieved September, 23 2006 from <http://www.coyoteoldone.com/?q=node/38>.

This is one of those pages that I basically snagged one little piece of information from so I could at least give somebody besides myself credit—in this case, the significance of the theta-delta symbol. However, Coyote is the administrator of <http://www.werelist.com>, which is another really good therianthropy resource, right up there with Shifters.org.

- Padfoot-Black Shuck (2004). *What the hell are you on about?* Retrieved September 25m 2006 from <http://www.therianthropy.org/padfoot/Therianthropy%20-%20what.htm>.

Pilkington, Mark (2004). Primary perception. *Guardian Unlimited*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/life/farout/story/0,13028,1234885,00.html>.

Pope, Hugh. (2003). *Catholic encyclopedia: angels*. Retrieved September 26, 2006 from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01476d.htm>.

The Catholic Encyclopedia was originally published in 1907 by the Robert Appleton Company. It's now available online, and the website sells CD-ROM versions to help pay for hosting costs and such. Also, I must mention that I found it rather ironic that the person who transcribed this particular article has the surname of "Pope".

Roberts PhD, Maureen B (1998). *Embracing the fragmented self: shamanic explorations of the sacred in schizophrenia and soul loss*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.jungcircle.com/embrace.html>.

Saevitia (2007). *From fiction: an otakukin website*. Retrieved 3 April, 2007 from <http://otakukin.atspace.com/index.htm>.

Sanguinarius (2006-A). *How would someone become a vampire?* Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.sanguinarius.org/faqs/index.php?cid=17&catid=13>.

-- (2006-B). *Terminology and lingo*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://www.sanguinarius.org/terminology.shtml>.

Sapolsky, Robert (2003). Belief and biology. *Freethought Today*, 5-23. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.ffrf.org/fttoday/2003/april/index.php?ft=sapolsky>.

This is a good essay on how biology affects psychological processes and the role genetics play in psychiatric disorders.

Solo and Duo (2005). *The transformation of the kitsune*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://heliwood.org/kitsune/writings/transformation.htm>.

Another worthy essay, this time on how the tails of the kitsune may be equated with the process of traditional alchemy.

Spaid, James (2006). *Gryphon relatives*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.gryphonpages.com/relatives/>.

SphynxCatVP (unknown). *How do i tell if i'm a vampire? (first, figure out what it isn't...)*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://sphynxcatvp.nocturna.org/faq/most-char.html>.

St. Philip, Elizabeth (1996). *Werewolf legend may be linked to disorder*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.exn.ca/html/templates/printstory.cfm?ID=1996102905>.

Star Elf (2001). *Untitled*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from http://www.elenari.net/Elenari/star_starelf.html.

Swiftpaw (unknown). *Tracing the origins of the term 'therianthropy'*. Retrieved January 1, 2007 from <http://www.otherwonders.com/swiftpaws/therian/old/termtherian.html>.

This is a neat page that shows the origin of the modern use of the word "therianthropy".

Temple of the Vampire (2006-A). *Temple law*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://www.vampiretemple.com/law.html>.

-- (2006-B). *The authorized vampire bible* [ordering page]. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://www.vampiretemple.com/bible.html>.

The Blackbirds, et. al. (unknown-A). *Four and twenty – because plurality is for the birds*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.karitas.net/blackbirds/layman/term.html>

--(unknown-B). *The layman's guide to multiplicity*. Retrieved September 22, 2006, from <http://www.karitas.net/blackbirds/layman/whatis.html>

The Blackbirds' site is highly recommended for multiples, as is <http://www.kinhost.org>

The Crisses (2004). *Abouttheproject*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://reiki.otherkin.net/wiki/Reiki/AboutTheProject>

If you have any interest in nontraditional reiki whatsoever, check this out. It's basically reiki as interpreted by certain Otherkin.

Therian Temple (2006-A). *The therian temple* [index page]. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://www.theriantemple.com>.

-- (2006-B). *The therian temple* [ordering page]. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://www.theriantemple.com/bible.html>.

The Vampire Psykic (unknown). *The effects of extended non-feeding*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://www.sanguinarius.org/articles/tvp-non-feeding.shtml>.

Tirl (unknown). *The shadow of myth*. Retrieved December 30, 2006 from <http://www.otherkin.net/articles/myth.html>.

Trollkvina (unknown). *Energy flows and tentacle monsters*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from http://www.sanguinarius.org/articles/energy_flows.shtml.

Lupa

Van Voorhees M.D., Abby (2005). *Congenital hypertrichosis lanuginosa*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.emedicine.com/dem/topic811.htm>.

Vashti (2005). User: *vashti/otherkin*. Retrieved September 23, 2006 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Vashti/Otherkin>.

There's some excellent history here, as well as other good information on Otherkin.

Wainwright, Corin (unknown). *Soulbonding faq*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://childofmana.tripod.com/soulbondingfaq.htm>.

This is the place to go to get information on the phenomenon of soulbonding.

Welker, Glenn (1998). *How the hopi indians reached their world*. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.indians.org/welker/howtheho.htm>.

Windrunner (unknown). *AHWW full faq*. Retrieved October 2, 2006 from <http://www.swampfox.demon.co.uk/utah/Community/fullfaq.html>.

This is one of several sites where I found the alt.horror.werewolves FAQ from 1997. AHWW is essentially where the online therian community got its start, and it's fun reading through the FAQ to see the community's roots.

Windtree, Rannirl (unknown). *Here and now*. Retrieved December 30, 2006 from <http://www.otherkin.net/articles/hereNow.html>.

Winged Wolf (2005). *Blood vampyrs*. Retrieved September 25, 2006 from <http://parazoology.psionguild.org/Vampyrs/oldvamppage.html>.

If you don't have a copy of Winged Wolf's The Care and Feeding of Vampires, this is a portion of her website to give you an idea of her viewpoint.

Yank MD, Glenn (2003). *Shrinktime* (™) issue 17. Retrieved September 24, 2006 from <http://www.m-a-h.net/shrinktime/issue17.htm>.

Surveys

As I have said before, I couldn't have made this book what it is without the help of all those who contributed surveys. While I didn't quote every single one of them, their answers all helped me to develop this book more thoroughly.

In the interest of saving space I'm not going to write out an entire entry for every single survey. However, I wanted to give credit to the following people who I received surveys from between the dates of September 13, 2005 and October 1, 2006. If you see quotes or

paraphrases attributed throughout the book to any of these names and there's no other citation, the information came from their survey answers. And so, in somewhat alphabetical order:

Áine, Anaikolra, Anituel, Anton, Arhuaine, Ashtara, Balthazar, Bandora, Brendan, Briana, Butterfly, C. "Defilerwyrn" Sims, Calaelen, Casteylan, Chaela, Conall, Criofan, CUSM, Delfynasa, Dinogrrl, Doc Holliday, Duo, Eko, Emma, Erelín, Erynn, Eshari, Expatriate, Faolan Ruadh, Ferratus Draconis, Firefen, Fox Blackmane, Gesigewigu's, Glowfly, Grey, Gryff Gradon, Ha Na, Havoc, Illanou, Isha, Janus Aran, Jarandhel Dreamsinger, Jen, Jennifer, Jezabel, Joy Moonwillow, Kaijima, Karl, K'hel, Kindarthyn Sims, Kira, Kistaro Windrider, Kitsula, Kmerathaetra, Knife-Smile, Korak, Liesk, Lysander Dominique Bretodeau, Malcolm-Rannirl, Maris Wolfe, Masticina Akicta, Meirya, Mela Atreides, Melinda, Miss Mouse, Mora Zoranokov, Mud Paw, Naserit, Nightsong, Nimue Moonwolf, Of Salfarro, Padfoot, Painted Jaguar, Palmer, Quicksilver, Quil, Raethyn Sarchaell, Raki, Ravenari, Rene, Rexar, Rhianna, Rhyannon, Rialian, Rumor, Rythen Eugea, Sa'arine, sade wolfkitten, Salaiek Tuar'ann, Sairen Min, Sarah, Saydee, Selonie, Shadowcat, the Shards, Sheena, Skatche, Siege, Silvaerin'a, the Silver Elves (Zardoa Silverstar, Silver Flame, Solon, Elantari Emerald Love), Simtra, Sirius, Solo, Soreth, Spanky, Suede, Sunaseth, Swift, Tala el'Shiharan, Teja, Temperance+++, Teriel, Thorinn, Tsuka, TygerMoon Foxx, Tysha, V, Vello, Violin Goddess, Willow, Wolfka/Nyx, Ymaryn, Zatará, five anonymous individuals and one anonymous multiple system.

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